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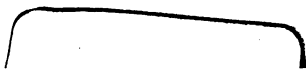
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# HENCE THESE TEARS.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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1872.

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## HENCE THESE TEARS.



### CHAPTER I.

#### THE WIDOW'S CRUISE.

**M**RS. WILFRED ESDAILE arose, silent and preoccupied, on the morning succeeding the dinner party at the "Priory."

During the whole of that entertainment, she had felt singularly unequal to doing the honours at the head of the squire's table, with anything like her usual ease and urbanity. Consequently, in our last chapter, she occupied a very subordinate position; and when Mrs. Wilfred became inconspicuous, we may accept it as a general rule, that some untoward circumstance

was in full possession of Mrs. Wilfred's mind.

While the ladies were alone, and the gentlemen were consuming their wine, Mrs. Wilfred had made a desperate attempt to rally her drooping spirits. Usually, a confidential chat with Mrs. Rutherford, of the "Manor," was anticipated by the widow with pleasure, and enjoyed with eagerness. But, somehow, on the previous evening, the mental relish of this *tête-à-tête* had failed. The discussion of the fashions in the last number of the *Queen* newspaper fell likewise extremely flat. The wife of the merchant squire had received, direct from town, in a private letter, some special and unpublished information respecting the babies of an illustrious personage. But even the keen zest of such a piece of intelligence could not rouse Mrs. Wilfred from her stupor. Lastly, the astounding fact, that at Paris crinoline had ceased to be known, while at Garwood every servant-girl would as soon leave her bonnet behind on a walk as her *cage*, startled Mrs. Wilfred, it is true ; but she only dismissed the tidings with a deep

sigh, and then resumed the inward contemplation of her own perplexities.

On the night succeeding the dinner-party, Mrs. Wilfred's slumbers were haunted by strange visions ; in one of which the squire came riding up to the Priory gates, with a rather diminutive damsel, in a blue serge riding-habit, perched sideways on the saddle before him. Harvey then leant forward on the pommel of his saddle, and tapped with his whip-handle upon the iron bars of his own gates ; when out came Julia Bellamy, with a large key, and admitted him. He shouted out to her, in a loud voice ; that he had been down to the Bench, and had just given some indefinite "her" two months for opening his letters. He explained that the Priory was empty, and that she, Julia Bellamy, and the young lady on the saddle before him, should have it all to themselves.

At this moment, Tommy Samler came running up, full tilt, from Garwood, with a gingerbread cake in one hand. The widow's dream was so minute, that she noticed his mouth was very brown all round from that

condiment. Tommy called to the squire and his ladies to look out, as "she" had escaped. Upon this, Julia Bellamy shrieked, and endeavoured to leap up behind the squire, on the already over-laden pony, while Tommy held the beast steady by the head. Suddenly, there was a cry that somebody was coming; whereupon the squire, Julia, and the damsel all jumped down, and fled into the lodge cottage, followed by Tommy. The deserted pony remained standing stock still in the centre of the road. Insensibly, its legs seemed to bend, to shorten, and to cross each other, until the pony gradually changed into a camp-stool: upon which sat Mr. Dionysius Eyserbeck, diligently sketching the ramping lion upon one side of the lodge gate. At this point, Mrs. Wilfred's lady's-maid knocked at the bedroom-door, and her mistress awoke, much exercised in mind by this strange phantasmagoria of recent events.

So, about noon next day, Mrs. Wilfred could contain herself no longer; and she confided abruptly to Violet in the drawing-room, that this anxiety about the squire's

strange goings on was wearing her away to a thread.

"And, pray, mamma," enquired Violet, looking up in some surprise, "what do you find now specially to be anxious about?"

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilfred, with a distressed look about her eyes; "I knew it. She does not know. She does not care. If a mother expects her child to share her anxieties, and, by sharing, to alleviate them, I beg to inform that parent she will be disappointed."

"Mamma!" expostulated Violet, reproachfully.

"Get along with you," scolded the widow, shaking her head; "I am out of patience with you girls. If Guy Fawkes himself was to begin piling his barrels and fagots in this very drawing-room, I don't believe it would strike you as anything odd."

"What can have occurred?" demanded Violet, thoroughly startled by this outbreak.

"Nothing has happened *yet*," continued Mrs. Wilfred, savagely, "thanks to my unslumbering vigilance; but a good deal is

likely to happen soon. But they can't lay their plots and schemes, and hoodwink me, while they are hatching them, whether they wear blue serges or brown merinos; no, nor twenty such!"

"You must mean the person whom we saw in the park?" hazarded her daughter, with a quick glance at Mrs. Wilfred; "the girl who stood and talked to uncle. Well, she looked pretty and quiet enough."

"Jack Cade or Greenacre," retorted the widow, contemptuously, "would look pretty and quiet enough to you, I am verily convinced."

Violet laughed, and made no rejoinder; for, when Mrs. Wilfred was put out, she did not bear contradiction with any great equanimity.

"Here is the case," pondered her mother, reasoning it out on her fingers, partly to Violet; but more with the aspect of a person, who pursues aloud a train of thought. "Harvey will not tell me who this girl is! When we appear, she is dismissed, only to be given another rendezvous, in a more secluded part of the village. Not a word

should I have heard of this, except through my kindness to Tommy Samler. Cast your bread on the waters, my dear. Then this Bellamy woman tried to write to him."

"Tried to write, mamma?" interposed Violet, in dismay, looking straight into her mother's face.

"I mean, did write to him," corrected Mrs. Wilfred, with a hurried cough; "how you do snap one up. Altogether, my dear," she concluded, in a voice of desperate resignation, "we may quite look to hearing that your uncle is going to be married, any day, and any hour. There, the murder is out; and, if that doesn't rouse you from your apathy, I give you up as hopeless."

"Indeed, mamma," said Violet, without a shade of surprise or irritation, "if uncle can meet with some nice person, who will make him happy: I am sure, that you and I shall be the first people to rejoice at the circumstance."

"Fiddlestick!" said Mrs. Wilfred, with decision. "Is my own child going to turn against me? A nice person, indeed; he won't get one! Likely to bring domestic



happiness ! Bah ! you talk like a girl in the nursery. Pray, who do you suppose this pretty, quiet, innocent, likely-to-make-him-happy personage is ?”

Mrs. Wilfred had a way of piling up epithets, if excited. When she had run through her stock of available attributes, she often concluded by coining a few more at random.

“ It is no business of ours,” murmured Violet, looking rather uncomfortable. “ That much is plain.”

“ A governess !” announced Mrs. Wilfred, with a contemptuous sneer ; “ and what do you say now, miss ?”

“ That this does not concern us,” repeated her daughter, cheerfully.

“ You are quite childish this morning, Violet,” protested the elder lady. “ I found out, at the Garwood stationer’s, that a young person, answering to my description, in blue serge, had been to his shop, and purchased some spelling and exercise books ; therefore, the shopman suspected that she was engaged in tuition, and I coincided with him : and he promised to get me her name,

on the next occasion that she called in there."

"What will the shopman suppose?" asked her daughter, with a face of dismay at this instance of the widow's astuteness, narrated with no little triumph and complacency.

"Let him think what he pleases," observed the mother, tossing her head; "I am Mrs. Wilfred Esdaile, and have no call to heed whatever a country stationer chooses to imagine."

"Oh! mamma, mamma!" expostulated Violet, in a pausing way, "you will get yourself into such trouble some day."

"I am not afraid like some people," replied the widow, with a jerk of her chin, indicative of resolution in the path of duty.

Now, during this dialogue, Violet was seated in a bay-window, which commanded the approach from the village, while Mrs. Esdaile preferred to avoid draughts by occupying the warmer and more central portion of the room.

"Mamma," re-commenced Violet, looking round with a start, after an interval of

silence, "I have half a mind not to tell you what I notice, as it will only fidget you the more in your present frame of mind, but——"

"Well, Violet."

"Uncle is going out."

"Your uncle's movements are of no interest whatever to me," said Mrs. Wilfred, screwing up her lips and leaning back resignedly. "Yes! I have been called interfering by my own child; let your uncle go where he pleases. Let him gallop to Gretna Green with four horses and twenty governesses, I will not raise a finger to forbid the banns."

"But I must own," returned Violet with her two elbows on the casement ledge, and her dimpled chin pressed upon both her hands, "that, just now, uncle's orbit *is* a little eccentric. What say you, mamma, to a morning ride, with a policeman running at each side of the pony, like the poor heroine did in the pitiful ballad of 'Child Waters'?"

Mrs. Wilfred's indifference vanished in a second; and, with an exclamation of sur-

prise, she precipitately joined her daughter at the window.

"What think you of this, mother?" demanded Violet, indicating the group, with a twinkle of mischievous amusement in her cloud-gray eyes.

"I am thunderstruck," exclaimed Mrs. Wilfred, raising her hands. "It is, indeed, a sight to freeze one's very marrow! Take my word for this, Violet, there is some mystery, in which that girl in blue is involved, going on under our very noses. From this, for some miserable reason, we are rigidly excluded. I do not intend to allow myself to be put so rudely aside without some further protest."

"And yet," suggested Violet, timidly, "the reason, that excludes us, may be good. Some affairs are not fit for ladies to be mixed up in. May not this police business of my uncle's be something of this description?"

"Violet!" exclaimed her mother, sternly, "I will not be contradicted. For my doctor says I am not to be irritated, as it sends the blood to my head."

"Indeed, I endeavoured, mamma, to calm you," said Violet, with a pout.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Wilfred, with a tightening of her lips, resolutely apostrophising the departing squire, "You thought, my friend, you were going to slip away nicely, but you can't deceive *me*. No," she concluded, graphically, "nor a dozen of your kidney!"

"Mamma!" cried Violet in a tone tinged with remonstrance.

"Well," rejoined Mrs. Wilfred, petulantly, "in our own family circle, when one is vexed, we may be allowed to seem a little forcible."

Violet, endeavouring vainly to soothe her mother, among other suggestions, proposed:—

"Magisterial business."

Mrs. Wilfred appeared for some seconds to waver, but her curiosity soon drove away her irresolution. So she solved the difficulty by exclaiming:—

"Violet, let us go up at once and hurry our things on."

"Excuse me, mamma," returned Violet,

coldly, "I will never be a willing spy upon my uncle's movements."

And the young lady left the window and took up a book, to the perusal of which she diligently applied herself.

"Hoity toity," scolded Mrs. Wilfred, with some want of candour, "what is to come next? I presume, a lady may select the hour when she chooses to take an airing, without a pert girl throwing imputations. You are an undutiful child," continued the widow with a frown of rebuke, as she left the room: "what would Mr. Wing say of such want in respect to a parent? Ring twice for my maid, and tell her to fetch my boots up at once."

Leaving the ladies, let us join the squire and his acolytes, then about midway between the Priory doors and the lodge gates.

The pony walked out briskly. By the squire's right stirrup-leather stalked Bradbeer, on the other side paced Culf.

"You acted rightly in coming to me at once," said Esdaile, tightening his hat on,

"When I found this plan—" began the inspector.

"If you please, sir, he didn't find it," interrupted Culf.

The squire shifted his head from right to left, and then to right back again at these conflicting claims of the executive.

"When this young man," recommenced Bradbeer, darting a glance of scorn and defiance towards the mutinous Culf, "under my supervision and by my direction, searched for this plan and happened to light upon it—"

"There, there," said the squire testily, "settle all that between yourselves afterwards. Let us get on to Mr. Raymond's now. Are you confident, inspector, that this rascal has really beaten a retreat?"

"He booked himself to Paddington, anyways," answered Bradbeer in an injured voice. The inspector felt, that the squire ought to have reproved Culf's aggressiveness, and supported a policeman of a higher grade in a more decided manner.

"Culf," said Esdaile apologetically, "run on and get the lodge gate open. Mrs.

Meet is apt to be a little deaf when the wind is high, and I don't want to waste my time to-day in shouting."

"I'm afraid," observed Bradbeer, when Culf had shot ahead, "that I must report that young man at head quarters. His uppishness knows no bounds, and his arrogance surpasses all one would expect from his lowly beginnings. I had him measured when a stripling—for I do not believe he was the regulation age, though his friends did put him on to advantage his paralytic father—but such as he were, I had him fitted into his first blue suit, and for him to rise against me ungrateful now."

Esdaile had allowed Bradbeer to continue unproved, this rambling diatribe against his subordinate: for the excellent reason, that the squire had not attended to a single word of the inspector's lament. Just before the lodge the park road took a sudden curve; and here, the last point from which the Priory windows were visible, it had occurred to Esdaile to look behind him. There, sure enough, in the far distance, he descried, with great dismay,



the indomitable Mrs. Wilfred, cloaked and bonneted for her morning walk.

"That sister-in-law of mine," sighed Esdaile to himself, "may be a very charming person; indeed, I learn on all sides that she is so considered; but I do venture to wish that she was a shade less energetic, and I should lead a quieter life of it, if she did not ransack all possible sources for information. She might have made a good historian; but, here, her avidity for knowledge only becomes an instrument for the social oppression of her relatives. Hey-day! what is that you are mumbling, Bradbeer?"

But, as now they had passed the gate and Culf had resumed his post as a kind of pendant running footman, Bradbeer could not well repeat his previous elegy on the ingratitude of men.

"I was saying, squire," said the inspector, in a surly voice and with a total disregard of accuracy, "that I wondered, how your housekeeper could venture to conduct this burglarious vagabond over the ins and outs of your worship's Priory."

"The family was out," explained Esdaile, trailing the lash of his hunting whip, and nearly tripping up the inspector over its lowest tag. "I beg your pardon, Bradbeer.— Well, this fellow strolls in at the kitchen end. There is no one to refer to on the question of leave. He represents, that Mrs. Wilfred has given him free permission to roam over the park at will. I must do the scamp the justice of allowing that to be the fact. On this, and with the prospect of an eventual half-crown, my housekeeper's scruples melt. He is shown over the place from attic to basement. At the end of the library his professional eye fastens upon an iron door. He laughingly asks the woman, whether this may be a blue-beard's cupboard; the idiot tells him straight out that I keep my deeds and plate there. He falls into an ecstasy over the picture hung nearest to my strong room, whips out a drawing - book, pretends to sketch the Rembrandt; and really makes a ground-plan of the premises. That is his *modus operandi*, though, I suppose, you don't

understand Latin, Culf; and the thing is done."

"I reckon," said Bradbeer, with a sagacious smile, "that, when you warned him off the park, he found his game was up."

Here Culf interposed with most reprehensible forwardness.

"I don't believe he would have stayed for that, if he had been minded to burst in."

"There is something in what Culf says," observed the squire, much to Bradbeer's disgust. "However, let us wait to hear what Lucas Raymond may have to suggest upon this subject."

"I would sooner act, as a officer, on your view, squire, than his," struck in Bradbeer, with sycophantic deference. "Lawyers are all very well for leases or parchment, but for your genuine gaol-bird give me a magistrate or a policeman."

Bradbeer, having craftily combined into one remark depreciation of Lucas, whom he disliked, flattery of Esdaile, and a side-compliment to himself, here paused and

cleared his throat, with the air of a man whose existence had not been wasted.

"You don't like Mr. Lucas, then, Bradbeer, eh?" demanded Esdaile, faintly amused.

The squire had an inveterate habit of chattering with anybody, high or low, in whose company he happened to find himself.

"I do not," replied the inspector, with an emphatic sniff; "and his housekeeper is worse than he is."

"In what way, Bradbeer?"

"Time will show, squire," with a mysterious and prophetic nod.

Here the procession encountered a boy driving a cow.

"Whose cow is that?" said the squire, arresting the youth in attendance with a voice of authority.

"It be a new un of Mrs. Copperson's."

"At Mile End?" exclaimed the squire, with a start of interest. "Why, what has become of her old cow? a black and white one, wasn't it?"

"Doid," said the boy briefly, and then abruptly added, "Groipes."

"Good-day," nodded the squire, much relieved by the explanation and continuing his ride; soon, turning to his attendants, he explained, "One likes to know about the stock in the neighbourhood. So you would not go to Raymond about this other affair? Now, pray, why not, Bradbeer?"

"Because," frowned Bradbeer, "that Eyserbeck knows the inside of Lucas Raymond's door too well to please me."

"You never mean this seriously, Bradbeer?" said the squire with an incredulous smile.

"Ay, ay," confirmed the inspector bitterly, "we might have had this fellow safe under lock now, for a common assault on Tommy Samler—for who would bail his likes?—if this lawyer hadn't come forward, and talked Mrs. Samler over for a matter of thirty shillings and a new cap for the boy."

"This is news to me, Bradbeer."

"Ah, you don't hear all, squire."

"So, being arrived, I halt and dismount,"

answered Esdaile, proceeding to do so. "Culf will walk my pony up and down, and I will join you, Bradbeer, presently at the market-house. Just give Raymond's office-bell a pull ; will you ? I think I have the plan about me. Yes ; I feel it here."

"Mr. Raymond in ?" to Hannah.

"Only Mr. Philip," she replied. "Mr. Raymond is taking Mr. Bramley's cottage rents to-day."

"Then Mr. Philip must serve my turn."

And the squire walked into the office.

"Day, Mr. Philip," said the squire, "none the worse for your dinner ? That's well. Uncle is out, I hear. That's a pity ; though I am not sure you will not do even better."

"I trust Mrs. and Miss Esdaile are in good health ?" enquired Philip, rather sheepishly, and in strangely tremulous tones.

"They are well enough," returned the squire, with a carelessness that Philip thought singularly heartless, as regarded one of the objects of his enquiries.

"The fact is," Mr. Esdaile went on,

"that it is just as well your uncle is out ; as, I am afraid, he must consider me a vacillating eccentric client enough already. Well, I will rush without preface into the middle of the matter. You know, I lately moved a box of deeds hence to the Priory."

"Yes," coincided Philip, "we had an assault case in the office that same day, so my uncle turned the matter over to me."

"Not Eyserbeck's ?" broke in the squire with a start.

"Some such name," agreed Philip with a nod.

"My usual luck," lamented the squire ; "then this fellow was actually in your office when this box was moved ?"

"I cannot say, precisely, squire, but I believe the fact was so."

"That decides me," exclaimed the squire, bringing down his fist upon the table, "that decides me; and explains his making his ground-plan."

Philip looked perplexed, and eyed the speaker attentively.

"All this is Greek to you," resumed the squire, "but I will explain more by-and-

bye. Now my plan this morning was to have moved this deed-box quietly back again to your office. I was glad to find you alone, for I really felt awkward in asking your uncle to take back a box, which I had so lately shifted."

"No doubt you have your own good reasons, squire," observed Philip imperturbably.

"What you have mentioned," mused the squire, scratching his chin, "about this fellow Eyserbeck, convinces me that my deeds would be quite as unsafe here as up at the Priory. So back they shall not come."

"Send the box to your banker's at Blackwater," suggested Philip in a thoughtful mood.

"That might do, certainly," deliberated the squire, biting an office pen; "but who is to take it? My servants consider it a point of honour to detail my least movement in the village here."

"That knot is soon untied," chimed in Philip with avidity. "I shall be proud to execute the commission myself."



"Now would you really?" considered Esdaile, gratefully. "Well, so you shall, and gain my thanks into the bargain. Now, hear my plan for getting this box away quietly. You walk up to dinner at the Priory some day soon. Don't dress; I suppose you don't object to a family party—only my sister-in-law and my niece."

The idea of Philip objecting! He reddened with delight, as he answered the squire in some incoherent expressions of his great pleasure at being permitted to join the family circle at the Priory.

"Very well," resumed the squire, briskly, "after dinner I will give you out of the box the special documents, which I wish to lodge with my bankers. I believe, I can fold them up into an average-sized parcel. Take these back to your lodgings for the night, and next morning get them to the Blackwater Bank for me."

"It shall be done," said Philip, with a resolute nod.

"You see," suggested Esdaile, thoughtfully, "that if I took these deeds in myself,

a rumour of my visit might work back to Garwood. So I would rather trouble you—”

“You shall, squire,” cried Philip, rubbing his hands. “I am quite keen for the enterprise.”

“Do you mean,” asked Mr. Esdaile, in a pausing manner, “to say anything about this commission to your uncle?”

“Quite as you please, squire.”

“Then do not. It is a matter hardly worth bothering him about,” decided Mr. Esdaile, coughing rather constrainedly.

“So be it then,” agreed Philip, after a short pause of hesitation; “but, it would be as well, for you to suggest some other business topic to colour your visit here to-day, of which my uncle must of necessity hear.”

“Tell your uncle,” nodded Esdaile, with a glance of intelligence, “that the renewal clause in Doorcast’s lease must come out. That will do. Now I am off. You will be ready to dine with me any day soon. I will give you a line of notice, when I see my way a little clearer.”

Thus having spoken, the squire quitted the office, and Philip, for the next half hour succeeding his departure, found considerable difficulty in concentrating his thoughts upon his legal employment. Mr. Esdaile's mysterious commission, and the supreme felicity of meeting Violet Esdaile under such favourable circumstances, would keep intruding themselves, to the great detriment of some "articles of sale," upon whose preparation he was then sedulously engaged. In due time, there came a turn of a latch-key in the street door, followed by the personal reappearance of Lucas Raymond in the office.

"So the squire has been," he began, divesting himself of his overcoat. "Well, what did he want?"

"To alter the renewal clause in Door-cast's lease," returned Philip, with a cough. "At least, that was the only message he left for you."

"The squire is a fidget," grumbled Lucas, drawing his gloves off. "That clause was not worth a journey. Are those 'articles' done?"

“Not yet, the squire has delayed me,” answered his nephew.

“Then buckle to them, my boy,” commanded Lucas, “for they must go to the auctioneer’s to-night.”





## CHAPTER II.

### AN OFFENSIVE ALLIANCE.

**B**EHOLD me of return," cried Christopher Bellamy, stepping coolly and jauntily into Julia's drawing-room in Arabian Crescent. He had outstripped the footman on the staircase, and now entered, unannounced, with the amiable intention of giving Julia a start.

"Behold me of return, *madonna mia*," he repeated, when the servant left the room, "I greet my devoted Julia with a French idiom, and an Italian salutation. What a thing it is to be blessed with a cosmopolitan husband!"

"So you are here again," said Julia,

with a slight accession of pallor, and the faintest quiver of the lip, but she neither rose nor extended her hand.

"Since," pursued Bellamy, with jovial effrontery, "it is voted vulgar in Bayswater, for married folks to meet in any manner, which might be censured as effusive, I suppose I had better sit down."

"I suppose you had," echoed Julia, without a shadow of cordiality.

"You do not ask me whence I come, Julia."

"Consider the question spoken—if you wish it, Christopher."

"‘From going to and fro in the earth ;’ consider the question answered, Mrs. Bellamy."

"Christopher, this is idle fencing," said Julia, with a change of manner. "You have been to Garwood."

"Where your good offices have sedulously followed me."

"I own it. You forced me to write."

"A most gentle compulsion," he sneered, frowning his forehead. "Did its old admirer write it back a nice little letter in a

round hand ? Has its pretty boy learned to spell, or has the growing of fat yellow turnips interrupted its education ?”

“ My letter,” returned Julia, between her teeth, “ did not arrive, as you know perfectly well. The reason was simple, you took it.”

“ Pardon me, Julia,” protested Christopher, with a puzzled look, “ you overrate my astuteness in this particular instance. Do not distress yourself ; your intimation reached this loutish squire.”

“ My second message did.”

“ What assiduous correspondents !”

“ You intercept one warning ; I repeat another of necessity.”

“ You are all at sea, Julia.”

“ Then why did you leave Garwood ?”

“ Want of funds, Mrs. Bellamy. A reason forcible and pithy.”

“ You can have spent next to nothing there.”

“ Rightly inferred ; hence I want to spend a great deal here. The enforced calm of this Bœotian village makes me hunger for genteel dissipation.”

"I hope," said Julia, narrowly watching the speaker, "that you now realize, how wild and hopeless a project it is, for you to attempt to destroy this evidence in the possession of Mr. Esdaile."

"Call him Harvey at once. Don't mind me, my old beauty," suggested Christopher, with a rude peal of ironical laughter.

Julia controlled herself with a considerable effort, and merely reminded him—

"You have not answered my question."

"I might well despair," bantered Christopher, in tones of mock humility, "when the precautions, set in motion by your warning, were so terrific and wholly overwhelming. Imagine this. The lodge-girl was replaced by a real velveteen game-keeper. Could anything well be more tremendous?"

"I suppose there are police in Garwood," hazarded Julia, mechanically.

Christopher could hardly contain his merriment.

"There are some most discreet and admirable watchmen," he repeated, in a random attempt at quotation, "who dis-



perse the boys, and soak all day in public-houses."

"Still your attempt is hopeless," persisted Julia, leaning her face wearily upon her hand; "and, in spite of your vapouring, you know it. You cannot return now to Garwood village without rousing the suspicions of the whole place."

"Frankly conceded," said Christopher, with a saturnine smile; "but I can visit my good friend Basset Rutherford, the Blackwater banker, who has a neat little box at Kidston Manor, four miles from Garwood."

"He would not receive you," answered Julia, but this time she spoke not over-confidently.

"Gad, he shall receive me," blustered Christopher, with a scowl; "we were both tarred with one brush in that cheque business."

"And yet," mused Julia, watching him narrowly, "you never said one word at the time about having an accomplice, either to my father or Mr. Esdaile."

"Not I," frowned Christopher, shrugging his shoulders. "My doom was sealed."

Dragging in my pal would not have lightened my sentence. Then, I thought, if I kept my counsel, Rutherford might assist my amiable spouse to subsidise me occasionally during my exile. But all this is digression, waste of time. The serious thing remains. Funds, Julia, funds; allow me to hand you your cheque-book."

"One thing, first, Christopher."

"A dozen, if cash is to end the catalogue."

"Is your departure from Garwood final, Mr. Bellamy?"

"I put it to your common sense, Julia, that I had better hold my tongue on this point. Being an ill-used man, you will not believe me, whichever way I reply. I tell you frankly, that, if I still cherish one fragmentary hope of success, I *shall* return. That is oracular, I confess; still I am not bound to show all my hand to Mr. Esdaile's fair correspondent. And now, Julia, draw me a good round sum, and I will relieve you of my presence."

"How much do you require?" sighed Julia, rising and moving to a drawer.

"A dirty three hundred!" explained Christopher, snapping his fingers.

"I shall make it one fifty," rejoined Julia, resolutely, raising her pen to write.

"It can't be done," denied Christopher, ruefully, "it really can't."

"And seventy?" pursued Julia, lowering her pen.

"Well, I won't be hard; make it eighty, and I'm off," agreed Christopher, with a strong air of magnanimity.

It was made one hundred and eighty, and the scamp went rejoicing on his way. Thereupon, Julia wrote to Esdaile, that she believed Christopher would not renew his attempts at Garwood for the next few weeks.

"Hah," soliloquized Christopher, as he paced along the Bayswater pavement. "It quite warms a poor fellow to carry a nice little cheque like this in his side-pocket. What a melancholy thing is mutual distrust between married people. Here is Julia, reprehensibly cautious about leaving any pin's head of a space on this cheque, where her unfortunate and out-at-elbows consort

could edge in the least of little figures to his own advantage. Ah, my lady, just wait till my turn comes ! You have stinted me, and I will prune down your little luxuries pretty freely. You shall make your own dresses at home, my girl, at a sewing-machine, or go without. I don't think I need keep a carriage for you. More walking exercise will be greatly beneficial to your health. Those two fat horses, and that razor-faced coachman, now awaiting your out-of-door toilet, shall be retrenched. You must give up lolling in rugs and leopard skins. A neat brougham, and a high-stepper for myself will answer all purposes. A box in Scotland, and a snug villa at Richmond, to which I can retire when I am bored with the state of respectable, comfortable, tedious connubiality. But these are visions of the Halcyon days to be. They fade, and sombre reality renews its reign. I follow my star ; and, in place of fairy palaces and perfumed fountains, I awake to find myself limping along on the hard-hearted London flags, in search, oh, melancholy bathos, of a drunken locksmith !

Courage, *mon brave*, the great have often risen, by even lowlier instruments ; let me from this mean mechanical nettle pluck the flower of opulence. Ah, here I am, at Tyburn. Here stood the famous gate. Classic ground, indeed ! The genius of the place has made me rhapsodical. But now I plunge into Oxford Street, and regain prosaic meditations. I certainly bear a brain, and do possess a commendable memory. Let me think over how it was. A lock—a mere engine of brute, unintelligent iron—stands between me and prosperity. I fall thinking and thinking ; and it comes across me, that one night, years since, in an Oxford Street bar, I heard a drunken sot boast that no lock could baffle him for more than forty minutes. I turned to some bystander—whom I utterly forget—and demanded if this was not the mere vapouring of a man in liquor. I am assured the creature has spoken truth, and, but for his indomitable love of ardent spirits, might—such was his dexterity—be an opulent and thriving tradesman. All this the animal himself confirms, with many maudlin

tears ; then, with the most placid effrontery, demands of me—utter stranger—the temporary accommodation of half a sovereign ; offering me, with somewhat of a twinkle in his beery eye, his note of hand for the amount. I was in a devil-me-care humour at the moment ; I was seriously pressed for cash myself ; in fact, I was then expecting Rutherford for that very interview, which ended in our ‘negotiating’ Esdaile’s cheque. But the irony of the situation struck me. Borrow of me at my own crisis ! The idea was actually delicious. I tossed away my last ten-shilling piece to the creature, with the air of possessing millions in reserve. I believe, also, that I rather wished to impress a thing in ringlets, behind the bar, with apple cheeks, and an aquiline nose, that I was a lord or a captain. How it all comes back to me ! Such is youthful vanity. The drunkard cringed and fawned on me for my munificence, swore he would repay me without fail, and scrawled, at my request, his name and address on a fly-leaf of this bulky and battered old pocket-book, which has been with me

through strange scenes and adventures ;  
and here it is—a shaky scrawl enough, yet  
legible,—

‘ Joseph Behrends, locksmith,  
‘ 37, Barrett’s Court,  
‘ Oxford Street,  
‘ Owes ten shillings. “ Crown and  
Sceptre.” March 10th, 1840.’

So, yesterday, my first care on returning to Babylon, is to try for Joseph, the afore-said, at the court which I have mentioned. Doubts of whether he might not have succumbed in the interval to his bibulous propensities distress me on my way. Not at all. Joseph lives, and still imbibes. He has removed, but not flown far. When number thirty-seven was forced to extrude him for some drunken scandal, not unaided by the executive, Joseph Behrends merely transmigrated to number forty-seven, in the same court, where he now resides ; and I shall ‘interview’ him at four this afternoon ; so I had better step out, for I am five minutes late by Quebec Street Chapel.”

Now Barrett’s Court, into which Chris-

topher presently turned aside from the contiguous roar of Oxford Street, is a den of grime and smoke, suggesting sweeps at home, gin-shops, and broken-down furniture. At forty-seven, Christopher pulled a crazy bell several times, before a broad-built, middle-sized man of fifty, with an inflamed nose, a moist eye, and pepper-and-salt uncombed hair, falling untidily over his forehead, presented himself. His dress was slovenly and mean. Several of his coat-buttons were gone. The knot of his neckerchief had drifted greatly to one side. The very shaking of his fat hand announced his propensities; so Christopher, with tolerable assurance—for he had wholly forgotten the man's face—observed on his appearance.

“Mr. Joseph Behrends, locksmith, I believe?”

“Step in,” suggested Joseph, and Christopher complied; “you are the gentleman, who called to see me yesterday?”

“I am, Mr. Behrends,” returned Belamy, in a tone of patronage.

“Do you come from my niece?” asked



the locksmith, eyeing his visitor with a kind of hopeful wistfulness.

"I fear not," replied Christopher, dusting his sleeve; "I only come on professional matters—locks."

"I'm your man," cried Joseph, with alacrity. "Step up. I regret to say there is a cobweb or two about. Mind that jug in the dark corner. Here we are."

They had ascended to the second floor, on which Joseph apparently occupied both the back and front rooms. The locksmith motioned his visitor towards the former.

"Sorry," explained Joseph, dropping his voice, "I can't take you into my best room to-day; he's asleep there now, and we should have no privacy. He has been in three days. It's rather wearing."

The door was not closed, and the heavy breathing of a man asleep confirmed Behrend's words. Christopher, glancing into the apartment, saw a rough-looking fellow drowsing, in a seal-skin cap. He lay back in an arm-chair, and his lower extremities were swathed for warmth in a mouldy horse-cloth. But the curious part

of the room was this : its walls were lined all round with screens of green baize, on which locks and keys innumerable were exhibited, of apparently every size, country, date, and fabric. Some locks were beautifully elaborate, others hopelessly clumsy. These two classes were placed in rather clever juxtaposition, with a possible idea of enhancing the contrast between them. Christopher's astonishment was plainly depicted on his features at this quaint sight.

"Ah, that's my collection," commented Behrends, with a sigh ; " they are a beautiful lot. It has taken me years to bring them together. I have old Romans, Grecians, Indians, Queen Elizabeths, Chineses, mediævals, down to Chubbs and Bramahs. They are a rare selection !"

"You are quite a *virtuoso* !" exclaimed Christopher, craning forward into the room ; "and, pray, who is that—gentleman, who seems to have been up all night ?"

"In possession," added the locksmith, querulously.

"A bailiff ?" interrogated Christopher, raising his eyebrows.

"Ay, ay," returned Joseph, gently closing the door. "Let us slip quietly into the back room. I don't want him awoke while I am in; for his temper is none of the smoothest. It's a pity, though, that my lovely collection should go, isn't it? They are to be took off next Toosday, unless I pay. It's an execution for £200. My niece sent me £50, but, bless you, that won't stave this off."

"My dear sir," interposed Christopher, laying a hand on the locksmith's knee, "I believe, I have arrived at the very nick of time, to rescue you from your financial perplexities, and to preserve your most interesting collection intact."

"No, no," denied Joseph with severe composure; "it's gone too far now. They must come to the hammer. Shall I tell you what has brought 'em there? The drink of this individual," and Mr. Behrends tapped his own breast and his tears welled up.

"Hem," said Christopher, "I have heard, Mr. Behrends, about your — weakness. But, please, cast your eye over this (pro-

ducing his pocket-book). I have helped you once and I will help you again. Do you remember inscribing this entry ?”

“ Phew !” cried the locksmith with a low whistle of surprise. “ You are that party. Ah, the ‘ Crown and Sceptre,’ to be sure. Though it is a main long time ago. Loans to me have never been so plenty, that I was likely to forget a golden one !”

“ Did not my loan astonish you ?” asked Christopher, narrowly watching him.

“ I did think you soft,” confessed the locksmith frankly.

“ Your opinion will be altered now,” continued Christopher with mysterious mendacity. “ I knew what I was about. I felt sure, that I should want your assistance sooner or later.”

“ It has been later !” hinted Joseph with a touch of irony ; “ a good deal later !”

“ Never mind when,” interrupted Christopher, rather nettled. “ Anyhow here I am now. Help me !”

“ What help is there,” protested the other, “ in a man whose goods a bailiff is sleeping upon ?”

"The help, which I want of you, resides in your fingers, and not in your furniture."

"I reckon," pondered Behrends moodily, "it's a difficult job of some sort in our line. I confess, that I haven't much heart to buckle to it, at a moment when my collection is being melted to the winds."

"Will fifty pounds more," demanded Christopher in his ear, "save these gim-cracks from dispersal?"

"I think so," said Behrends, checking off sundry items on his fingers; "but I'll put it to him when he rouses himself."

"Harkee, Mr. Behrends," pursued his visitor confidentially; "fifty pounds are yours, if you will open for me a certain lock."

"Maker?" enquired Behrends laconically.

"Bramah," was the reply.

"Done with you," said the locksmith, slapping his thigh. "I shall want fifty minutes at it without interruption though," he added, breaking off abruptly.

"I fancy," surmised Christopher, though

his face showed a little uncertainty on the point, "that I can guarantee you that—by candle-light."

"Daylight is best," suggested the man of locks with his head sideways.

"No doubt," hesitated Christopher airily; "but my friend in whose house this lock is, is a little crotchety; and we must consult his convenience rather than our own."

Behrends looked up sharply at the speaker, and then seemed to become slightly uncomfortable; for he produced a handkerchief, and stood wiping his brow in a constrained and awkward attitude.

"Is the key lost?" questioned Behrends after a pause, in a husky voice.

"The owner," explained Christopher in his most insinuating manner, "is, I regret to say, likewise crotchety about lending me the key."

"I can't do it," panted Behrends with a hitch at his lip, as a light seemed to break in upon him. "I won't do it. Drink I may, but I ain't got to that yet."

"Then good-day," replied Christopher coolly, rising to leave. "I hope your col-

lection will sell well on Tuesday. Good-day."

"Stay," shouted Behrends extending his hand ; "wait a moment. Let me reflect. This place swims round with me."

Christopher resumed his seat, and began to hum little snatches of operatic melody. He looked the picture of indifference, while poor Behrends seemed undergoing a most agonizing mental conflict.

"How do you mean to do this?" gasped Behrends at length, with a dry kind of sob and a heaving chest.

"Really, my dear sir," laughed Christopher with exasperating nonchalance, "you make a mountain of a mole-hill. With your admirable professional skill, this matter is ridiculously simple, and, I am convinced, surprisingly easy. As to risk, there is none. The door, which I request you to open, is in a country house in Cropshire. The owner is a fool, and the servants a bevy of blockheads. There is not a policeman with a head on his shoulders for miles round. I can manage, that the house shall be literally deserted when we

pay our visit. The domestics shall leave in a troop to witness a performing conjurer. The owner shall be decoyed away by a false telegram. I'm no vulgar robber. I don't want plate or valuables. My sole object is to possess myself of a deed which is mine by right ; and, by the withholding of which, this squire is keeping me out of my just inheritance. I pledge you my word, I will not take a sixpence from the house. I am too rich to require that. Now look you here, waken that bailiff, and if he consents to compound this matter for fifty pounds more than what your niece has remitted to you : I will pay him twenty-five pounds in advance for this job, that you are to do for me ; if you refuse I shall verily believe, that you are afraid of a Bramah, and have no right to call yourself a locksmith."

"Oh Lord ! oh dear !" lamented Behrends, wiping his face. "Give me a night to think this scheme over. I don't like it. No ; I don't. I've no friends, and I can't get no advice, and all my pretty things will be sold next Toosday !"



"I tell you what, my friend," returned Christopher, indicating with his cane a formidable row of thin brown glass bottles, "If those are your friends and associates, I advise you not to take advice to-night by adding another to that empty phalanx."

"Don't be hard 'on a miserable fellow," whined Behrends knuckling his eyes like a school-boy.

"Tut, tut," said Bellamy, "don't sit howling there."

"Cropshire, too," blubbered Behrends, "where my own brother's child resides in affluence and respectability. This is bitter."

"Rubbish, man," reproved Bellamy; "Cropshire is forty miles across. You talk of it like a paddock or a cabbage-garden, where you and your niece must collide every few moments."

"She is sure to hear of it somehow."

"Fudge," said Bellamy, eyeing him with great contempt. "Snivelling won't mend matters. Let us see first what the sleeper says. Then, if he is amenable to reason, you shall sleep upon this also, before you decide yea or nay. By ten to-morrow I

return and receive your ultimatum, which, I am confident, will be favourable. At the same time, I will appoint with you the day, and arrange the train we are to go down by. Is that right?"

"As right," said Joseph with an accession of pallor, and a tremor of the lips, "as a bad job can be, that I am loath to handle. If it were not for those darling bits of metal in the next room, to save which I would almost cut my right hand off: I'm jiggered, if I would not have had you down stairs, for coming here to tempt a tradesman in distress; that I would," and Joseph concluded in rather a menacing attitude.

"Bravo!" applauded Christopher, with languid appreciation. "Now we have done with the moral element, suppose we settle to business, and snap the rosy dreams of the gentleman in possession."

This was accordingly done; but what passed with the bailiff need be only briefly repeated. He was nearly sure "his governor" would allow him to withdraw on payment of "a round hundred." Under what circumstances that sum was to acquire its

supposed rotundity, he skilfully left to the imagination of his hearers. So Christopher engaged to return in the morning, and, on receiving Joseph's adhesion to his scheme, undertook to pay out the bailiff, and to preserve the incomparable collection.

Then Christopher departed, and Joseph Behrends hardly knew, whether to breathe a blessing, or mutter an imprecation on the retreating footsteps of his visitor ; but he finally solved, or rather compromised, the difficulty by a strenuous application to a half-ebbed brandy-bottle.

When Christopher got back into Oxford Street, he again consulted his inexhaustible pocket-book, and exhumed from one of its voluminous recesses a printed slip, cut from a recent number of the *Cropshire Advertiser*, which ran to this effect ;—

“ Signor Fresco, professor in necromancy, magic, illusion, prestidigitation, and the allied arts, will have the honour of holding one of his miraculous *séances* in the Market Hall at Garwood, on Friday, June 19th. Reserved seats, 3s. ; stalls, 2s. ; pit, 1s. Performance to commence at 8 p.m. The

nobility and clergy in the district are entreated to apply early for places, to prevent over-crowding and confusion."

"There," thought Christopher to himself, "like a skilful general, I force chance events into my service, and ensure my own success by accidental combinations. On the night of this conjuring I enter the Priory strong-room. Every servant in the house shall receive a ticket gratis, which shall reach them, as though from the Signor himself. If this sodden Squire Esdaile resists the allurements of necromancy, trust me to tice him away by one of my many expedients at the same hour. Behrends and I shall have an empty house to work our will in. Bravo, Christopher, the affair marches. A little more patience, and Julia shall crouch to you in ashes and sack-cloth!"



## CHAPTER III.

### VIOLET FAINTS.

**T**HE day after Christopher saw the locksmith, brought a note from Mr. Esdaile, suggesting that Philip should come up without ceremony, and dine at the Priory that very evening. The writer explained, that, Mrs. Wilfred being laid up with a severe cold, he and Philip would be almost alone the whole evening, a state of affairs favourable to the discussion of certain matters between them. Mr. Esdaile added, that he had received later intelligence, which seemed to render any immediate precautions respecting his documents unnecessary; still, he would gladly talk matters

over with a second person, as these complications were seldom absent from his thoughts.

Philip returned a ready assent by the hands of the groom, and the legs of the carriage horse, who had conveyed this bidding to Mr. Eavestaff's premises. Philip had received with a thrill of pleasure the intimation, that the squire and himself would be "almost alone;" for the young man felt convinced that slender qualification of solitude did not exclude her company with whom, most of all living beings, he desired to be.

About fifteen minutes before the time that Philip was due at the Priory on that evening, Mrs. Wilfred was sitting up in bed eating boiled chicken and rice, and sipping at intervals port wine, nutmeg dust, and hot water. She was arrayed in a most becoming costume, a cap and bed-gown—both liberally trimmed with blue ribbons—and was engaged in the laudable employment "of keeping herself up." Her indisposition had originated in persistently following the movements of the squire and

the two policemen through some brisk showers, and a lane which was a quagmire of puddles. Having thus succumbed to her zeal in the public service, Mrs. Wilfred felt, that she might, on many grounds, consider herself a martyr. Pending the beat of the dinner gong, Violet had come in to see how the invalid was getting on. In a plain white book-muslin gown, and a cherry-coloured sash ; with a wreath of live clematis in her hair and at her breast, Violet looked exceedingly lovely. Certainly, Philip Raymond had some excuse for making but lame progress that day during office hours with his legal work. It is a mercy, that he did not insert the name of Violet into Farmer Honeywell's covenant not to break up too much pasture ; and that he managed to refrain from alluding to Miss Esdaile in a correspondence about a right of way between a maiden lady and a publican grazier.

To resume. Mrs. Wilfred sat up in bed, and eat fowl and rice with an appetite, that, medically considered, was extremely encouraging.

"Turn round slowly, Violet," she beckoned with a wave of her arm at her daughter. Violet obeyed, and the mother ended her inspection with a nod of approval. "You look very nice this evening."

"Thank you, mamma," replied Violet, demurely.

"I wish you would not wear that wild rubbish."

"The clematis, mamma?"

"Yes, that hedge-running thing."

"I can't well alter it now."

"So you always say, Violet," muttered her mother, brushing the crumbs from her pillow. "You have no bracelets on, either."

"I prefer to wear no jewellery to-night," Violet answered, after a moment's hesitation.

"What new freak is this?" demanded Mrs. Wilfred, with severity. "And with some one from Garwood to dinner, where every single thing is noticed. It will be given out in the High Street to-morrow, that you have not a trinket to your name."

"There is only young Mr. Raymond to



come," laughed the young lady. "In the first place, he won't notice my lack of ornaments; next, he won't gossip about the circumstance, if he does; last, he will not think any the worse of me for the omission."

"Have your way, my dear," observed Mrs. Wilfred, resignedly; "but one thing I must beg, don't lower yourself by conversing too freely with this young lawyer. If your uncle chooses for his own purposes to treat him as one of the family, I don't. Assert your position, my child; I know I can rely upon you."

Though, we must confess, that Mrs. Wilfred felt anything but reliance in Violet upon this particular point of self-assertion.

"Please tell me how, mamma?" asked her daughter, provokingly obtuse and in seeming good faith.

"Fiddle," exclaimed the widow snappishly, for the moment rather at fault. "How?—in a dozen ways. Look as if you were somebody, and don't be too communicative. Remember, Mr. Raymond, junior, is not in county society."



Now, with any young man of family—Mr. Bramley, for instance,—when a girl has a remark to make, she need be under no such restraint.”

“I can’t help feeling instinctively afraid of Mr. Bramley,” insisted Violet, rather gravely.

“Pshaw! my dear; he has eight thousand a-year,” retorted the widow, in a tone of conclusive refutation.

“I shall feel rather awkward about leaving the room alone at dessert,” observed Violet, with a faint tinge rising in her cheeks.

“Keep your ears open,” suggested Mrs. Wilfred, “if they begin their business-talk before you. They, perhaps, may consider you as nobody, and so not mind your being there; you may pick up something interesting. Ah, it’s just like your uncle.”

And here the elder lady paused and shook her head.

“Picking up something?” hazarded her daughter, mischievously taking wrong the meaning of her monitress.

"No, miss," returned her mother, savagely; "and don't pretend you thought so! My complaint against your uncle is this, that he no sooner finds me comfortably confined to my bed, than he gallops off a groom to fetch this young lawyer up to dinner. In fact, these last few days, policemen, lawyers, and governesses, have been his constant associates. Where is this to conclude, and what does it all portend? And here am I, the only person with the wits to fathom their intrigues, chained to a bed of sickness. It is galling!"

And Mrs. Wilfred sighed, and helped herself to some more fowl.

"Dear mamma," persuaded Violet, soothingly, "this is only some tiresome magisterial business, with which we have no cause to concern ourselves."

"Nothing of the kind," cried Mrs. Wilfred, resolutely shaking her finger.

"As to young Mr. Raymond," pursued Violet, with heightened colour, "uncle has only invited him, because Mr. Philip Raymond is much nicer to consult with than Mr. Lucas; and, if he went down to the

office, he would have to talk with the elder gentleman, who always gives me 'the creeps' when I see him. There : that's my explanation. Does it not satisfy you, mamma ?"

"I see nothing nice in either of these Raymonds," Mrs. Wilfred answered, with a contemptuous wave of her fork. "I never could abide the law. I prefer military men, or naval."

"I shall always like Mr. Philip," maintained Violet, gratefully, "because he saved my little Flora's life."

"Anyhow," sneered the widow, stealing a glance at her daughter, "your uncle and you seem to have settled it between you, that this Mr. Raymond is to have the run of the Priory, whenever he likes."

"And there goes the dinner-gong," said her daughter, not sorry to conclude the discussion ; "are we to send you up anything, mamma ?"

"In my reduced state," replied Mrs. Wilfred, picking a bone with an air of relish, "I can take extremely little. Had not Mr. Lapworth expressly told me to

keep myself up, I should not even consume this nourishment. No, Violet, go down and enjoy yourself, and don't trouble about me. If Mr. Esdaile should enquire, say, I am about the same."

And, having magnanimously dismissed Violet and concluded her repast, Mrs. Esdaile dived from human view ; and her daughter stepped down to dinner.

Philip had already arrived, and the squire had said to him in the interval before Violet appeared :

"A person in town, who has the key to this rascal Eyserbeck's movements, has written to say, that he is unlikely to renew his Garwood plots for two or three weeks."

"So you do not mean to move these documents, then, Mr. Esdaile?" demanded Philip, with a touch of disappointment.

"The very point I am puzzled over," replied the squire, with a wandering glance. "I feel half-inclined to leave them where they are at present : in a kind of cell, with none but barred loop-hole windows, behind an iron door, secured with a Bramah lock : who on earth can get at them?"

"No country thief could, clearly," pursued Philip, after a pause of deliberation ; "but this fellow does not despair, since he made his plan *after* he had seen the Brahmah lock and the iron door."

"You advise removal, then, Mr. Philip?"

"On the whole, yes, squire."

"Your reasons."

"Well," argued Philip, watching his effect on the squire at every few words, "your great risk consists in this : it is known precisely to this vagabond *where* to find what he wants ; now, in spite of locks and iron, would not these deeds be safer now from *him*, thrown unprotected into your waste-paper basket, where he does not know that they are ? Inasmuch, as that would be the unlikeliest place in the world for him to search after these papers in ?"

"I see your point," said Esdaile, reflectively, "and in a measure agree. Can you take these papers back to-night with you ?"

"Readily, Mr. Esdaile," from Philip, with flashing eyes.

"And yet you are walking," remonstrated the squire dubiously.

"Apparent carelessness is the safest policy," advised Philip, with sudden fervour, "in a matter of this moment. No one would think it worth while to rob a foot-passenger. I will walk."

"You shall have the loan of my old pocket-pistol," suggested the squire, with an approving smile. "I loaded it five years ago. I wonder, if it will go off still?"

"I won't refuse it," returned Philip, with a quick laugh; "just in case our friend Eyserbeck should have his ear now applied to the outside of that window-shutter."

"Hush!" cried the squire, with a start. "Here comes my niece. Late, late, Miss Violet; after the reprehensible manner of your sex. You have spoilt Mr. Philip's soup, who will now signify his forgiveness by giving you his arm."

So they went in to dinner. During the meal the squire was in high spirits, and conversed incessantly with the young people. He seemed more like a boy out for a holiday, than a staid country gentleman.

We fear that the absence of Mrs. Wilfred from the festive board was mainly accountable for the squire's hilarity. Violet, on the other hand, seemed anxious and depressed. But she was very kind to Philip through it all ; and this, added to the clematis and the red sash, rivetted his chains of bondage on that unhappy youth tenfold. He nearly lost his head with delight in discerning, or fancying that he discerned, a kind of gentle solicitude for himself, blended in her manner, whenever she addressed him. Be this as it might, the dinner seemed to Philip an enchanted banquet, presided over by a benevolent genius in the person of Squire Esdaile.

When Violet had arisen after the repast, with the new and unaccustomed honours of a hostess covering her with a pretty confusion, Esdaile at once recurred to the leading topic in their thoughts.

"Fill your glass, Mr. Philip, and listen to my plan of operation," said the squire, chipping off an angle of his biscuit.

"I believe Miss Esdaile has forgotten her handkerchief," interposed Philip, pro-



ducing that, to him inestimable, relic from beneath the table-cloth.

"Lord bless you, yes," the squire broke in, with some impatience. "Did you ever know a woman, who did not mislay her handkerchief unless she was tied to it?"

"I shall take the liberty of restoring this," murmured the younger man, carefully consigning the treasure to his coat.

"Take some more wine," repeated his host, tilting the claret jug in Philip's direction; "that is more to the purpose; and now, please, attend to me."

"Proceed, squire," said Philip, absently, rousing himself from other thoughts.

"Imprimis, we will not sit here long."

Philip brightened at this intelligence. The golden moments were flying, and Violet was awaiting them alone. When should he see her again under such propitious circumstances? His time at the Priory to-night was very precious. The squire's anecdotes across the strawberries would not suffer from keeping; but Violet! That was quite another pair of shoes!

"So," said the squire, "I see you ap-

prove of my resolution, number one ; one more glass, and we move to the drawing-room, get a cup of coffee, and then for business. I shall drop my niece a gentle hint that we can do without her society."

"Quite so," agreed Philip, in rueful accents, and with a face of dismay ; "but don't hurry Miss Violet on my account, as I can sit up until any hour ; and we shall have ample time to get these papers out after her usual hour of retiring."

"Ah," threw in Esdaile, dubiously, "you may keep awake, but I'm by no means sure of myself. No, no, my friend, the girl shall run off early to rest, and we will send the servants to bed also ; and then you and I will unlock the strong-room, without creating any needless comment in the house upon our proceedings."

"I must make the most of my time," thought Philip, as he preceded Mr. Esdaile into the drawing-room.

Violet was at the piano, playing every kind of fragment that came into her head ; and blending these together into a kind of miscellaneous overture, in which pieces,

grave and gay, Italian, English, and German, in turn appeared, ran their few moments of melodious life, and then gave place to others.

The squire flung himself into an arm-chair, and took up a newspaper.

Philip seated himself beside Violet at the piano.

"Please, don't leave off," he entreated most earnestly ; "it is such a delicious treat for me to listen to you. I get no music in the village."

"I am playing one of my jumbles," explained Violet, without discontinuing the air. "They answer two purposes. They soothe me, and they help me to think. Do you know" (in a lower voice, after a pause), "I am very anxious to-night, Mr. Raymond?"

A newspaper and an arm-chair acted as almost instantaneous opiates on the squire, if he had recourse to either after his evening meal. So it was to-night ; Mr. Esdaile had already begun to doze before Violet had concluded her sentence. She had stolen a glance towards her uncle, and

ascertained his condition, before she had, on the impulse of the moment, told Philip of her anxiety.

"I wish I could dismiss your cares, Miss Esdaile," rejoined Philip, fervently, with a glow upon his face.

"I know, that I ought not to ask you," went on Violet, hurriedly, and her hands seemed to tremble upon the keys; "and I believe, that you ought not to tell me; and I am very silly and wrong, but——"

"My dear Miss Esdaile," interposed Philip, drawing his chair an inch nearer, and greatly agitated by this appeal, "your distress makes me beyond measure wretched! If I could do anything to alleviate it, I should be the happiest fellow upon earth."

Violet blushed, hesitated, and then rushed into the kernel of the matter at one bound.

"Why," she demanded breathlessly, "did my uncle talk about lending you a pistol to-night? Why did he say 'hush!' when I came into the room?"

"There might be poachers about,"

explained Philip, with a forced evasive laugh.

"Look me in the face, Mr. Raymond," Violet pleaded, with a heaving bosom; "and if you have the heart to repeat this subterfuge to me, do so."

"I have not the heart," said Philip, as their eyes met. "You have conquered."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Violet, with a momentary flush at the manifest admiration expressed in the young man's glance. "I knew it. Then what is this dreadful business?"

"Merely this," rejoined Philip, leaning very near the beautiful locks and the clematis, "since the truth will alarm you less than the vague imagining of something worse. Your uncle is good enough to entrust into my hands to-night a package of the utmost importance. Half in jest—as I own it would be serious if this package did not reach its destination—half in jest, I say, he offered me an old rusty pistol with which to keep off imaginary foot-pads."

Violet mused for a few moments over Philip's explanation, while the plaintive air

of "Old Robin Gray" trembled out beneath her fingers.

"And you leave here," she inferred suddenly, with marks of concern, "at night, on foot, and alone, on this commission of evident danger?"

"My dear Miss Violet," murmured Philip, an infinite tenderness, in spite of himself, pervading every intonation of his reply, "the danger is imaginary. I wish to Heaven it were really more formidable than it is."

"Why?" questioned Violet, with a little prescient shiver at the coming answer.

"Because," responded Philip, with flashing eyes, "I should desire no fairer destiny, than to devote my useless existence to the service of your uncle, or—of your uncle's niece."

And Philip gave a deep sigh of relief. He cared little what came now. He had managed to tell Violet Esdaile that he would die for her; and that was enough. He made the avowal, he believed, in all sincerity; and he longed for twenty Eyserbecks to waylay him on his way home, to

prove that he was no vapourer, full of empty sound and declamation, but an honest man ; one who, having given his word, would abide by it, whatever it might cost him.

As for Violet, the day had come to her in the process of green leaves and sere ; of sable night and purple dawning ; when she was first to hear that, of all women's lives the end and epoch—a man's spoken love. It had come then to her, as to the myriads of Eve's daughters who were dust, it had come already. The great climacteric—the realization of the infinite—the you and me alone with eternity ! love ! The spasm of its revealment had passed. It was over, and gone ; and it never could come again. Whether this particular bud of love was to thrive or wither on the tree of life, signified nothing. In love, the first avowal is the key-stone of whatever regal fabrics may follow—of whatever dismal ruins may hereafterstand—where a temple's holiest precinct should have been. Violet had heard Philip speak, and she trembled exceedingly. She knew, that her life had, in that instant of

time, received a completeness, which she could not as yet understand. But she felt awed and dizzy, like one, in a dream of a vast cathedral, with a sudden storm of organ sound bursting from the choir, and an unexpected glory of tremendous light streaming in at the east window. She bowed forwards on her hands, and "Robin Gray" ceased abruptly, in a wail of jumbled notes, and then silence.

"I am faint," she murmured, in a hardly audible whisper; her eyes closed, and she faltered as she tried to rise.

Philip's arm was round her in a second, or she might have glided from the music-stool. He bore her—a light and precious burthen—to a neighbouring sofa, and there he laid her down tenderly; while the squire, whose slumbers were hardly dispelled by the occurrence, was still rubbing his eyes.

"God bless me," exclaimed Mr. Esdaile, coming to the rescue, "I fancy she is going to faint. Get her some water, Raymond, and ring the bell for her maid. I believe, I have been asleep. How did this occur?"



"I am better now," said Violet, with a deep breath, opening her eyes. "It is a mere nothing, uncle."

"I will be bound," reasoned the squire, sagaciously, "that she has caught Mrs. Wilfred's influenza. Lapworth half expected it to run through the house. How do you feel now, my dear?"

"Nearly well," replied Violet, languidly, sitting up, "thank you, Mr. Raymond."

This last to Philip, who stood ruefully watching her, with a tumbler of water in one hand : regarding himself, with some justice, as the arch culprit in the recent catastrophe.

"Perhaps," suggested the squire, on the appearance of Violet's maid with the usual restoratives, "we men had better retreat to my study. You will get her up to bed, when she is strong enough," he added, in a side-whisper to the handmaiden.

"Good-night uncle and Mr. Raymond," spoke Violet faintly, extending her hands. "I have been very silly. Good-night!"

"I hope," said Philip, penitently and meaningly, "Miss Esdaile will forgive my—having fatigued her."

Violet gave him a smile of pardon, which was balm in Gilead to the storm of remorse, which Philip had endured since his passionate avowal.

Then Philip and the squire went away to the study ; where Mr. Esdaile began to open various drawers, and to produce a multitude of keys, until at last he lighted upon the one which he sought. He then ascertained that Violet had gone upstairs, and that the library, and other living rooms, were quiet and deserted. Next, he rang and sent the servants to bed, saying that he himself would let out Mr. Philip Raymond, and make fast the front door, after the egress of his visitor. Then he lit two flat candlesticks, one for Philip and one for himself, and lastly exclaimed in a cheery voice—

“And now, my boy, for the Garwood Strong Room,” so the squire laid his hand upon the handle of the door to go there.

Rapid footsteps approaching the study along the corridor.

“Who the devil is that ?” from the squire petulantly, to the outer darkness.

"A telegram, sir, from London," from a resuscitated footman.

"Very well," said the squire, opening the yellow envelope. "You can go to bed again."

"The plot thickens," thought Philip to himself.

"Just in time," exclaimed the squire, slapping his thigh. "Just in time, by jingo. Listen. 'Don't move the packet to the Blackwater Bank ; it is the worst place it could be in. E—— said casually this morning that he had influence there. More by post !' "

"A formidable rascal this after all," commented Philip, with a stare of amazement. "The Blackwater Bank in league with this scum ! Why, the thing is almost incredible, Mr. Esdaile."

"Not more so than the whole of this unlucky business," concluded the squire, tossing back his key into a drawer, and extinguishing the candles. "My correspondent may, for all that, be relied upon. And now this packet for the present must rest here, and you may walk home leisurely

with no need of my pocket-pistol. Wait a moment though ; come up here after office hours to-morrow, and we will see if the post has made matters any clearer. Good-night."

"I shall be glad also," added Philip, concernedly, "to enquire how Miss Violet finds herself."

"It's only a faint," said the squire, with careless composure. "The women of my day used to faint twice as often as the girls do now ; and I believe they were never the worse for it."





## CHAPTER IV.

### COUNTERFEIT COIN.

“**G**OOD day, Mr. Lucas Raymond.”



“Sir to you, Mr. Wing.”

The lawyer and the curate had met near the market-cross, and this was their greeting.

“Can I say a word to you?” said the curate, taking him by the button-hole.

“Some words are long ones,” responded the elder gentleman, dubiously.

“Suppose,” Wing continued, with a wand-like motion of his umbrella, “that a tradesman, say a hatter, were to dun you very pertinaciously for his account, what should you, as a man of law, do?”

"I should pay him," said Lucas curtly, "whether lawyer or layman."

"Precisely," added the clergyman, with a blank look of disappointment, "only, in stating my case, I omitted to premise, that payment is inconvenient to my—hem!—friend."

"Then pay he can't," decided Lucas, endeavouring to shake off his questioner. "Talking won't mend matters either way, and really, Mr. Wing, I am pressed for—"

"One second," said the curate, clinging to the lawyer's coat-hem. "I meant—ha!—is there no legal method of—hem!—evading payment?"

"Let him go bankrupt. Good morning," and the lawyer took a few onward paces.

Mr. Wing shivered, but remained rooted to the spot. Suddenly he ran after Lucas, and caught him again by the arm.

"I am really ashamed to trespass upon your valuable time, but—"

"Go to my nephew at the office, there's a good man," said the lawyer, trying to release his coat-sleeve.

The curate reddened in a conscious manner ; Mr. Philip Raymond was just the last person of whom he cared to ask the question on his lips.

"These Esdailes," stammered Wing, after a confused pause, "I suppose now that you know all about them."

"Well," admitted Lucas, who saw that something was behind, "suppose I do?"

"The ins and outs of their family affairs, I mean, and so forth—"

"And so forth?" echoed the lawyer dryly and rather contemptuously. "I really cannot undertake to answer for the so forth."

"Miss Violet now," began Wing with his head on one side ; and then, pausing, he faltered for encouragement.

"Miss Violet then," repeated Lucas, determined not to help him on an inch.

"Would she have now any chance of the Priory estates?" blurted out his questioner at last, fidgeting about with his hands.

"You had better ask Mr. Esdaile," observed Lucas with a sneer.

"That would be absurd," exclaimed Wing, red to the roots of his hair.

"I quite agree with you," Lucas said with a grave bow.

"You evade my question," insisted the curate, flourishing a cambric handkerchief to cover his discomfiture; "it is generally stated, that the squire will at least leave his niece a nice bequest."

"He would hardly leave her a nasty one," said Raymond, with rather brutal bluntness.

"This is trivial," protested Wing with a gesture of impatience.

"Hark'ee here, Mr. Curate," retorted Lucas, eyeing Wing very hard, "I do not chatter my clients' affairs in the street."

"I merely thought, I might ask you as a friend," stammered the curate, coughing under his hand vehemently.

"And you are answered by a lawyer. Good-day," from Lucas with icy sarcasm.

"It has struck me on my former point," recurred Wing, pertinacious to the last.

"Which, the hatter or the heiress?"

"The hatter, of course," corrected the



curate hurriedly ; " it has struck my friend, that part of the hatter's account having been incurred before he was of age, that my friend might make his father liable for the debt and escape. What do *you* say, Mr. Raymond ?"

" Nothing consoling to your friend," replied Lucas, drawing back with feigned reluctance.

" Pray speak all the same."

" You insist ?" replied Lucas between his teeth.

" Indeed, I must, in the cause of friendship."

" I began," spoke Lucas, very deliberately, " by thinking your friend—a fool. I am now convinced that he is also—a knave. Good-morning."

And on this occasion Lucas Raymond really made good his escape. Wing remained near the market-cross in an attitude of melancholy abstraction. He felt dimly conscious, that the lawyer had snubbed him very severely. He felt perfectly convinced, that Lucas had told him next to nothing. His situation was becoming daily more

perplexing. Mr. Westcott had threatened to descend in person upon Garwood, and to expose the curate before his own parishioners, unless certain remittances were immediately forthcoming. Should Paul have recourse to a father nearly as poor as himself in a small Westmoreland incumbency? There were three sister Miss Wings, growing up in that remote parsonage, who all required "finishing," and who had not a chance of getting completed. They had lived almost upon oatmeal for three years to keep Paul at Oxford, and to turn him out a gentleman. It was agreed on all hands, that, this once done, the family fortune would infallibly be made.

They had succeeded in turning Paul out at least a dandy, and now they were poorer than ever. Paul had written to several of his "tuft" friends on the subject of livings, but somehow the subject never seemed to get any further than paper. Yet under the pressure of calamity human ingenuity is keen, so Wing had taken counsel with himself, and determined there and then to retrieve his fortunes by pro-

posing to Violet Esdaile. He should have preferred, it is true, to have waited a season before making his declaration. With time and opportunity, he had felt pretty certain of leading captive the affections of the squire's niece. This unlucky tailor had forced him to precipitate his avowal. This enforced abruptness of declaration might frighten off the girl, it is true, but the chance was well worth trying. And then Westcott would accord to him an indefinite reprieve, once the engagement was publicly announced.

It had, indeed, occurred to the curate, that it would be as well, before he committed himself to the rosy paths of love, to ascertain something really definite on the subject of Violet's expectations. Now Lucas Raymond, the family lawyer, was obviously the fountain-head of all such information, as Paul Wing then sought. Therefore, the curate had waylaid Raymond that morning, and the dialogue, that resulted from his ambush, has been duly set forth.

We say, that Wing stood plunged in

reflection for some moments, after the lawyer had broken away from his questioning. But the curate's doubts ended by a hasty return to his own apartments, where, seizing pen and paper, he indited this note :—

“ Garwood, June 15th, 1862.

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ I was grieved to receive your communication of yesterday ; and I must, as a clergyman, remind you, that such exhibitions of temper, as you have therein manifested, must ever be in the highest sense deplorable. The matter between us merely amounts to this, when divested of all unnecessary irritation : you are anxious for the settlement of an account, which just at present it is inconvenient for me to pay. This intelligence my last letter conveyed to you in most temperate and courteous terms. You reply, that you will descend in person upon Garwood, and gibbet me as an insolvent, before my flock. Now, really, Mr. Westcott, it is very sad to see a tradesman of your standing so far forget himself.

Such a proceeding, as you contemplate, could only result in the disgust and withdrawal of many of your present customers. Of my own college, with which I still maintain unbroken relations, I can at least speak with confidence. Let me also remind you of a fact, which the bluster of your threat seems wholly to ignore; the greater portion of my indebtedness to yourself was incurred during my minority. To a person of your business experience it is needless, that I should state the legal inferences of this state of things. I may also casually mention, that I intend to contract an alliance with a lady of family and position: whose present means, though good, are wholly dwarfed by her future expectations. I therefore hope, that you will have the good sense, to take no further rash and ill-considered steps in this matter, and that you will write me at once a line of apology for the childish vehemence of the effusion to which I am now replying; and I venture to remain, my dear sir,

“Yours very obediently,

“PAUL WING, M.A.

“So much for my friend Westcott,” exclaimed the curate, as he folded, directed, sealed and stamped this letter. “I will leave this on my table for the present, till I ascertain my doom from the fair Violet. If the servant comes in meanwhile and posts it, all the better for me ; since, if I should be refused, Westcott will be quieted all the same. For it is perfectly true, that I intend to contract an alliance with such a lady, as I have there described. Whether she intends to contract one with me is another matter. I think, I hedged that point rather dexterously about debts contracted under age. I am by no means clear, and that old bear did not choose to enlighten me, whether the debts of a minor fall upon his father or upon nobody. Either way, I am clear of them, which is a refreshing consideration. What a shame it is, that I should waste my time upon tradesmen, while I might have been completing my ode. I should have submitted the poetry to Violet, and so paved my way to a declaration. Here am I forced to carry out impromptu at an hour’s notice, a pro-

gramme of courtship, which I should have preferred days to arrange in its minutest details. Well, well, there is no help for it. Now I must dress and stroll up to the Priory; Violet goes out about noon, I believe; and village rumour reports Mrs. Wilfred, as laid up with summer influenza."

Some three hours after this soliloquy of the curate's, Violet Esdaile rushed into her mother's bed-room, looking red, agitated, and withal extremely charming. She could hardly get her breath for a few moments, for the young lady had returned home from half way to the lodge with amazing celerity. Mrs. Wilfred sat up in bed, and regarded her with a countenance in which wonder was blended with severity.

"Oh! mamma," panted Violet, holding her hand against her side, "what do you think has happened?"

"My dear," rejoined her mother with heroic philosophy, "my nerves are shattered, and I may say, I am prepared for anything."

"Mr. Wing overtook me in the park,

and, oh ! it was so dreadful and awkward—" and here Violet broke down.

"Go on, you tiresome girl."

"And—and—he made me an offer of marriage."

"Is that all?" exclaimed Mrs. Wilfred snapping her fingers. "Well, I suppose you thanked him and said that you would rather not."

"No," said Violet, nearly crying ; "I ran away as fast as I could, and said nothing."

"That was silly," decided Mrs. Wilfred, biting her lips ; "you must get hardened to these kind of occurrences, my dear ; I used to expect them as a matter of course at Malta."

"I should die of confusion," cried Violet, covering her face with her hands.

"Yes," pursued her mother, touching her own finger-tips in reflective succession, "there were as many as seven from her Majesty's ship 'Blunderbuss' alone, and two were lieutenants : one of whom was your dear papa, as I then knew nothing of his expectations. Quite romantic, was it not?"

"What a dreadful life it must have



been," commented Violet, with a shiver, at her mother's retrospect.

"I don't know that," doubted her mother, with considerable dignity. "How did this affair of to-day take place?"

"As badly as it could," blushed Violet, disconsolately; "for I was very, very stupid, as you shall hear. Well, up came Mr. Wing, and began, as he always does, about the schools. Only, I noticed he was very smart and very much scented. He went on to say, he had been writing some verses, and would I wish to see them? So he began reading these out; and Flora having at that moment got her hind claw into her collar, I did not attend quite as much as I ought to have done. But I know there was something about a maiden, and some pine-apples, and a good deal more very complimentary. When he had done, he turned very red, and asked me, with a sort of tremor, what I thought of the young lady? And I stammered out, that she must have been a very nice person, though I did think her, to myself, rather greedy. Then a kind of a film seemed to

come over Mr. Wing's face, and he nearly shouted out, 'You are the maiden, Miss Esdaile; and I love you, and my fate is in your hands; and, if you refuse me, I am a ruined man.' And then—I ran away!"

"A nice pair of simpletons," was her mother's sole remark.

"Will he be ruined really?" said Violet, in an anxious tone.

"Not he," returned the widow, with a decided and contemptuous jerk of the head; "men always feel bound to say something of the kind. In the service, brains and pistols are usually mentioned; but, being a clergyman, Mr. Wing had to adopt something milder."

"I wonder, if I shall ever get calm," said poor Violet, with quickened breath.

"Has your uncle come in?" enquired the widow, dismissing the subject as done with, and wholly trivial.

Leaving these ladies, we return once more to Garwood High Street, and to its two chief guardians, Bradbeer and Culf. They leant, as usual, against the outside

wall of the "Headless Woman;" but a look of unusual importance pervaded the features of the Garwood inspector. He had shaken his head at intervals during the whole morning, but no word had as yet passed Bradbeer's lips, to explain why his head was shaken so ominously. He had done this shaking also in a secret and reticent way, which had deeply impressed his subordinate. At length, Bradbeer cleared his throat; and Culf perceived that the time for action had nearly come.

"The squire," said Bradbeer, solemnly glancing at the market-house clock, "will be sitting in the magistrates' room in ten minutes. Under half a hour, you will learn something, Culf, my boy, that will take away your breath, and make your skin creep. You will also have an opportunity of judging, whether I understand my business, as the head of the police force in this town, or whether I do *not*."

The inspector laid such portentous emphasis upon the concluding negative, that Culf was obliged to regard himself as personally challenged.

"I never said you didn't," grunted Culf, with a twinge of remorse.

"Not in words, Culf," responded Bradbeer, gloomily; "but many is the time you have said it in your actions and general uppishness."

"If I have then, it can't be helped," said Culf, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Now, I saw you measured into your first clothes," reminded Bradbeer, raising his warning forefinger.

"You always bring that up against me," grumbled Culf, kicking out at the flags. "I could not have come on beat without 'em. What's the thanks to you? Government paid the tailor!"

"You will be sorry for these words soon," interposed Bradbeer, with a nod that was saturated with mystery; "and, at last, here comes the squire. And now for it!"

So the three entered the market-hall together, and in due course reached the magistrates' room.

"Well, Bradbeer," exclaimed Esdaile, as he seated himself at the green-baize table,

"what have you brought me here for this morning?"

"A most serious case, squire," pronounced the inspector, in a voice like an earthquake.

"If it is anything out of the common magisterial run," considered Esdaile, "you had better step round for our clerk, Raymond."

"Excuse me, squire," interposed Bradbeer, swelling with importance; "Mr. Raymond had better be out of this, at least on the bench side of the business."

"What is the charge?" asked Esdaile, hurriedly.

"False coining," from Bradbeer, in a fat voice, replete with dignity.

"The culprit?"

"Lucas Raymond's housekeeper!"

Culf nearly sprang into the air, and Esdaile threw down his pen, in blank amazement.

Bradbeer, with the consciousness of having covered himself with glory, stood before the squire, proud, yet graciously condescending.

"You are demented, Mr. Inspector!" threw out Esdaile, at last, chafing his hands nervously.

"Squire," broke in Bradbeer, radiant with sagacity, "this woman, for months since, has gone on in the strangest of ways. She brings heaps of silver every few weeks to some Garwood shop. She either pays it away in bills, or exchanges it for gold. She passed this sixpence (producing it) at Eavestaff's last Monday. It is counterfeit. So is all her other money. I have twenty shillings in this bag, all bran-new, and of one date."

"This is some mistake," insisted Esdaile, trifling with the pewter magisterial inkstand. "You run round, Culf, and desire Mr. Raymond and Mrs. Armitage to step up here."

"I would rather do this myself," from the inspector.

"I dare say you would," said the squire with unusual firmness, "but Culf shall go all the same."

"Shall he handcuff her?" enquired Bradbeer, red with vexation.

"Certainly not," from the squire, ill at ease.

"Then," said the policeman, resignedly, "that boy will never get her up this staircase."

Despite this ominous prediction, Mrs. Armitage arrived quietly enough soon afterwards. She looked scared and terrified at this unusual summons, and her normal pallor seemed slightly increased. Still, she curtsied to the squire with some show of composure, and demanded his pleasure in a tremulous but clear voice.

"Swear me, squire," struck in Bradbeer, pompously on her entrance, holding out a testament.

"Hold your tongue," Esdaile reproved, snappishly; then turning to Mrs. Armitage with a change of manner, he began:

"There is some mistake here, Mrs. Armitage, which I have ventured to send for you to explain. This officer maintains (I shall not swear him yet, as I do not believe it will be necessary), that you are in the habit of changing away at various

Garwood shops large quantities of what seem to be new shillings—”

Hannah's hand here clutched the back of Esdaile's chair, and her lips quivered.

“Look at her squire!” exclaimed Bradbeer, with unfeeling exultation, “that doesn't seem very much like denying it.”

“I have told you once to be silent, Bradbeer,” muttered Esdaile, with increased sternness. “Now, Mrs. Armitage, be good enough either to contradict, or to explain this officer's statement.”

“He has spoken the truth,” said Hannah, in a dead silence.

Bradbeer clapped his hands with delight. Esdaile changed colour, and resumed very slowly :

“This is serious, Mrs. Armitage. Have you nothing further to add?”

“Why I changed these shillings,” gasped Hannah, with a despairing sigh, “depends upon a secret, that I never will reveal.”

“Then,” continued Esdaile, dipping his pen in the judicial ink reservoir, “we must, after all, proceed to sterner measures. Take the book, Bradbeer.”



Bradbeer advanced with a step of triumph to take it ; but, at this moment, Lucas Raymond entered the magistrates' room in considerable trepidation.

" Bless my soul, Mr. Esdaile !" ejaculated Lucas, gazing round in amazement upon the scene which met his view, " in the name of wonder, what does all this portend ?"

" Be composed, Raymond," said the squire, laying his hand soothingly upon the arm of the lawyer. " You will need all your calmness, for the present case is likely to be an extremely painful one."

" Case ?" interrogated Lucas, turning fiercely upon the two constables. " What have you fellows to say against Hannah Armitage ?"

Hannah stole an approving glance at her master. His sudden entrance seemed to have inspired her with new life and revived confidence.

" I am safe now," she thought, and folded her hands before her. " Master will make it right, somehow. I believe my brain would have given way, if he had not come."

“Lucas Raymond,” spoke the squire, moving his pen at him, “Inspector Bradbeer is prepared to swear, that your house-keeper has been in the habit of changing away large numbers at a time of new shillings in Garwood.”

“And a sixpence,” added Bradbeer, maliciously, with twinkling eyes. “Don’t forget the sixpence, squire—a rank bad one.”

Lucas was evidently much annoyed, and for some seconds thoroughly ill at ease into the bargain.

Suddenly the lawyer burst into a hoarse laugh.

“You don’t mean to say,” exclaimed Lucas, in great excitement to the justice, “that Bradbeer asserts all these shillings of Hannah’s to be bad ones?”

“So I certainly understand him,” answered Esdaile, waveringly.

“The sixpence is bad enough,” said the inspector, with dogged confidence. “The shillings being struck the same year as the bad sixpence, and coming bran-new from this party’s hands, are bad also, I will

wager. But the sixpence is enough for me."

Lucas laughed aloud.

"My dear sir, this is too absurd," he explained to Esdaile. "Let me see this sixpence."

It was produced, and Lucas rang it on the chimney-piece.

"Counterfeit, I allow, Mr. Inspector. Now for the shillings."

Bradbeer told out twenty bright shillings in a row on the green baize. Lucas took up the first, and its ring was as clear as a bell.

Bradbeer changed colour, and Culf brought his hand to his mouth to hide a grin.

"The rest are perfectly good, squire," said Lucas, handing him the coin. "They ought to be, I am sure, for I had them direct from Rutherford and Rodney's Bank at Blackwater. They have never been yet in circulation."

"What makes you say these are bad, Bradbeer?" asked Esdaile rather sharply of the official. "Have you tested them chemically?"

"You want no chemistry to that there sixpence," snarled the policeman, shifting his ground.

"Are you prepared to swear, that my housekeeper uttered this sixpence?" demanded Lucas, snapping him up in great wrath.

"Mr. Eavestaffe is," returned Bradbeer, stoutly and savagely.

"Run and fetch the grocer, Culf," commanded the squire, impatiently. Culf left the room at once at a hand-gallop of alacrity. "Why the dickens did you not fetch Eavestaffe before?" went on Esdaile, pettishly. "The matter seems to rest entirely on his evidence."

"I was ready to swear all he did, and a deal more," subjoined Bradbeer, a little crest-fallen, but still turgid and confident.

"You can't swear to what you did not see," argued Esdaile, thoroughly nettled.

"We are often expected by the public to do so," said the Inspector, grimly.

During this passage of arms between the justice and the constable, and pending the arrival of the grocer, Lucas and Hannah

had conferred together in hurried whispers, apart from the green baize table.

At this juncture, Eavestaffe entering hatless, aproned, and with his hair flowing ; the enquiry was resumed in a dead silence.

"Now, Mr. Eavestaffe, about this sixpence," said the squire, extending it for the grocer's inspection ; "the constable says, that you are prepared to affirm on oath, that this was passed to you by Mrs. Armitage."

Bradbeer had, during this address, sidled up close to the grocer, and now, with a nudge of the elbow, he muttered in his ear :—

"Swear along, Eavestaffe, I know she passed it. You trust to me. I'll prove it arterwards."

But, despite this inaudible encouragement, the grocer faltered.

"Make haste. Don't be mealy-mouthed about it," urged another whisper and a harder nudge from the official.

"Come away from that witness, Bradbeer," struck in the justice, "and stand here behind my chair."

"I will tell the truth," gasped Eavestaffe, not daring to meet the glaring eye of the inspector.

"I'll commit you, if you don't," said the squire pithily.

"I found this sixpence in my till," hesitated the witness ; for the swelling wrath of the inspector behind the justice's chair was awful to behold, "on the same night, that Mrs. Armitage came in with a number of new shillings."

"How often do you clear your till out?" interrupted Lucas.

"Every three days or so," confessed the grocer, and he quailed anew under Bradbeer's furious eye.

"Confound it, man," cried Esdaile, dashing his pen down in disgust, "then what made you connect this sixpence with Mrs. Armitage?"

"Please, squire," said the grocer, shifting uneasily from one leg to the other, "it was Mr. Bradbeer told me, that he knew Mrs. Armitage had passed it to me."

"The case is dismissed," said the squire, rising ; "Mrs. Armitage, let me personally

beg your pardon for the officious blunder of this constable. I shall report your manner of taking evidence, Bradbeer. Now be gone, for I'm sick of you. Lucas Raymond, let me shake your hand ; I am as much relieved as you are, to find this is all moonshine and muddle of Bradbeer's. Good-day, Mrs. Armitage ; morning, Eaves-taffe. Culf, remain and lock the door when we leave. A word in your ear, Raymond," and the squire drew the lawyer aside.

"Your housekeeper is a strange woman," Esdaile resumed in a lowered voice, poking his finger at Lucas's ribs ; "a most remarkable woman, upon my word."

"Squire," said Lucas with heightened colour, "I freely confess, that this blunder of that consequential idiot, our inspector, has annoyed me beyond measure and belief."

"It is really not worth fretting about," consoled Mr. Esdaile ; "it won't get wind in the village. Bradbeer's lips are sealed for his own credit. And the grocer is frightened to death of Bradbeer, so he will keep it quiet."

"It is not that," proceeded Lucas looking

down, "which I dread, so much as the effect of this sudden appearance before a justice upon Hannah. She is a woman of a highly sensitive and most nervous temperament. She has seen much sorrow in her early domestic relations, and is always brooding on the past. Now any sudden shock might utterly destroy her mental equilibrium. Therefore, I regret, that, of all people in the world, Bradbeer should have selected her for his experiment in the detective service."

"I will have that fellow severely reprimanded," [observed the squire. "I quite see, that Mrs. Armitage verges towards—eccentricity already. When questioned about the possession of so much new coin, she said, this was connected with a secret, which she never would divulge."

"Did she now?" exclaimed Lucas with a momentary flush; "that is just her way. I fear, I must give in, that she is absolutely flighty when agitated, as under this accusation she would be. Which reminds me, that I owe you some explanation of this fact myself. I collect most of Bramley's



cottage rents, and pay the navigators, who are at work on the new railway bridge over the Bevern. Hence, I am forced to lay in large reserves of silver, and the Blackwater bank generally gets it down fresh from the mint."

"Quite so," agreed Esdaile; "I suspected some analogous explanation."

Then the squire and the lawyer separated, after cordially shaking hands. Esdaile mounted the irrepressible pony, and Lucas disappeared behind the brass plate on his own door. Bradbeer, furious; Culf, mildly triumphant; Eavestaffe, tremblingly propitiative; remained respectively in front of the market-house.

"I hope, Mr. Bradbeer, you don't bear malice," fawned Eavestaffe, rubbing his hands.

"I have nothing to say to you," returned Bradbeer, loftily waving the little tradesman aside. "I withdraw my custom, Culf withdraws his custom, from your shop."

"Do I though?" interposed Culf, dubiously.

"A man who goes against the force,"

explained the senior policeman, "is not to be dealt with by any of its members for their tea and sugar. I say this to you, Eavestaffe, in my public capacity. But as a brother man, let me add this remark, in which I have no wish to be unduly hard upon your weakness ; and it is simply this, that, if I could not undertake to swear to more than you could this mortal morning : I would tie the biggest paving-stone out of the High Street round my neck ; and cease to be a disgrace to any civilized community, by jumping into the Bevern. I do not mean this to disencourage you, Eavestaff ; but it is only right that you should hear my sentiments."

After which address the grocer slunk away home, greatly crushed.

"Inspector," said Culf, when they remained alone, "we made a mistake this morning."

"Not a bit of it," denied Bradbeer, resolutely ; "it is all that Lucas, who can turn the bench round his finger. I know many beaks, that would have shut up this Armitage on half the evidence tendered."

"But she was not guilty," suggested Culf, mildly.

"If she was not guilty of this," concluded Bradbeer, "she was guilty of something else!"





## CHAPTER V.

### WATER-LILIES.

**E**MMA Klein had just deposited a letter to Julia Bellamy in the Garwood post office ; and, this done, she turned to retrace her steps to Kidston. In the natural course of things, she had to pass the brass plate of "Raymond & Raymond," on her homeward course. Just as she came abreast of the gloomy brickwork of the vicarage, a nosegay fell on the pavement at her feet. She glanced rapidly up to the higher tiers of the vicarage windows, but not a soul was to be seen. The house looked absolutely deserted. Not a window seemed to have been opened. Instinctively, she

gathered up the bouquet and hurried on. The incident, though commonplace, had startled her exceedingly. The flowers were choice and pretty. Could the spirits, supposed to haunt the recesses of the vicarage, have turned horticulturists? Or, on the other hand, and her cheek flushed at the thought, could she have unconsciously captivated that silent young nephew clerk, who lived with the Garwood attorney? Was this the manner in which bashful Cropshire swains made the first advances to the beloved object? Anyhow, the situation was embarrassing enough, and Emma Klein tripped homewards at double speed; in some trepidation, lest the young lawyer himself should presently appear, in the wake of his nosegay, on the high-road behind her.

A mile and a half out of Garwood the road crosses the river Bevern by a solid workmanlike bridge on three arches, with no great pretensions, however, to architectural beauty.

In a quiet side-pool of the river, visible from the vantage point of the bridge

parapet, floated some magnificent water-lilies. Emma leant over the current to covet these treasures, when an oarsman appeared in the distance, sculling a neat wherry up to the bridge. The boat neared her rapidly enough, and Emma stayed to see it shoot through the arches of the pile beneath her ; not till it was close upon her, did she recognize in its navigator Mr. Gilbert Bramley.

At the same moment Gilbert knew the young lady on the bridge, and raised his boating-hat.

"Hulloa, Miss Klein," he exclaimed, resting on his sculls, "fancy our meeting here. Do you know, you are the very person I was thinking about?"

Emma's face showed anything but displeasure at the mental and actual coincidence.

Bramley drove his boat aground, and leapt out. Presently he joined Emma on the bridge.

"What nice flowers. Who gave them to you?"

"The vicarage ghost," said Emma, with

a musical laugh ; "they fell on the pavement at my feet, as I passed Mr. Raymond's."

"You are not serious."

"I am frightened to death by the incident," said Emma, with a toss of her curls, "but I snatched up the flowers all the same. Lovely, are they not ? Now, if you would push out your boat, and get me one of those water-lilies, I shall return home freighted with riches."

"Readily," agreed Bramley, with flashing eyes, "with one little condition annexed, that you come and help me to gather them. It is so pleasant on the river, and I am moped to death rowing about in that worst of company, my own."

Emma's cheek flushed with pleasure at the proposal, but she wavered for all that.

"Remember your promise," laughed Bramley, teasing at her nosegay, "when I released you from Garwood station, and the grim old woman."

"Promise ?" smiled Emma. "Do leave my poor flowers alone, Mr. Bramley."

"That you would come out with me to

see a glow-worm. Now I compromise that glow-worm for these water-lilies; therefore, on every consideration of good faith, you are bound to step into my boat."

Emma laughed, deliberated, drew back, wavered, and eventually allowed Bramley to help her into the wherry.

"I have only half an hour," said Emma, rather frightened, when she had actually embarked.

"We can see something of Bevern in that time," observed Bramley, "and now, first for the water-lilies: here they come, dripping nicely. They shall stay in the bows till I bring you back. I shall row up stream. It is much quieter than the Garwood way."

"How deliciously clear the water is," said Emma, with the least of little tremors in her tone. She was beginning to wish, that the quest of river-buds had never tempted her; and yet it was so nice gliding along, and Mr. Bramley looked so handsome.

"It is so good of you," said Bramley,



in a soft dreamy way of his own, "letting me scull you about. I can't get a word with you at Kidston, and my semi-aunt looks thunder all the time. You know, I would rather speak to you than any one there."

Emma cast down her eyes and smiled a sad serious smile.

"Let us except Miss Rutherford," she murmured at last, silyly. "Let my turn come, when she and her water-colours are exhausted."

Bramley gave an abrupt laugh.

"My dear Miss Emma," he answered, with a shrug of his shoulders, "I am a bad boy. I hate all that is good for me. I detest prudence. My worthy aunt-in-law has settled, that Caroline Rutherford is good for me, inasmuch as the aforesaid Caroline will probably be some day rich; therefore, Caroline is presented to me in the form of a duty; and the result is, that I run away from her."

Emma listened with a beating heart. She was too much of a woman not to hear this careless depreciation of her rival with

keen pleasure. Could Bramley really prefer her to Caroline after all? The thought was very delicious. The Bevern banks, in their array of summer verdure, changed every moment, as the boat's head sheered through the clear crystal with a soft rushing sound. The flowers leant over where they rowed along. The lark sang overhead; and the rich avenues of lime and elm sighed in the June wind. The clouds unfolded their glorious canopies in the sweet heaven above them. Everything was very good. There was summer also in the heart of the forlorn governess, and she abandoned herself to the enjoyment of the precious evanescent present. That day, on which a woman first realizes that she is loved, is with her the seventh and completing day of her creation; and then, indeed, all the universe, within and without her, seems unspeakably, indescribably good.

"I am tired of rowing," said Bramley, at last; "let us tether the boat to one of these little river-islands, and enjoy the sunset together quietly."

The boat-head was made fast to a willow

stump, and Bramley came and sat down beside Emma. That part of the river was secluded, and not another boat hove in sight. Distant voices were calling the cows in from the pastures, and there was that soothing noise of innumerable insects in the air. Emma trembled as the young squire took his place beside her.

"You are cold," spoke Bramley, tenderly adjusting his boating-jacket about her shoulders, but having once placed his arm round her for that purpose, he will not withdraw it.

"No," said Emma, in a whisper hardly audible, "I am only happy."

"See," cried Bramley, impetuously. "Emma, watch. The sun will touch that low cloud-bank in a second. Now he floats in pure cold air, and there is no purple in heaven. Wait! There it comes. What a revelation of infinite sudden-born colour! You actually see the rivers of crimson, rushing and branching away, through the veins and channels of the cloud-belt."

"The sun is lost," said Emma, looking

away with moist eyes. "Hark, what a lull there is. I think, one ought to hear an angel singing now over the dead glory of Phœbus. What but such a voice can fill this divine pause of nature?"

"Let me try," whispered Bramley, drawing nearer him the unresisting girl. "I do not speak of myself, but some great impulse within, which tears and masters me, as yonder gold does yonder cloud, forces me to say—I love you—Emma!"

"And I you, Gilbert," in a flood of tears.

Their lips met, and the reed-warblers began to sing.





## CHAPTER VI.

### THE CUSTOM OF THE COUNTRY.

**A**N hour afterwards, Gilbert and Emma were rowing back again calmly enough, and talking over their plans for the future.

"My own darling," cried Emma, breaking into a smile of ineffable fondness, "how good and thoughtful you are."

"You must leave Kidston at once, Emma," decided Bramley, in a thoughtful voice. "I am sick of Cropshire, of aunts, and of heiresses. I shall break up my establishment at Brendon, and we will winter in Italy together."

"Oh, Gilbert, that will be heavenly!"

exclaimed Emma, looking upwards. "Except in my dreams, I never hoped to reach the land of myrtle and citron."

"When I hear, that you are free from your situation," said Gilbert, playing with her hand, "I will follow you quietly up to town, and thence we can slip over silently to the continent. Thus, no unnecessary comments need be caused among the magnates here over our movements; and no one need connect our simultaneous disappearance from Cropshire circles."

"And we shall be married in London before we start," premised Emma, radiant in her happiness.

"Y-yes, I suppose so; oh, yes," agreed Bramley, with a spice of hesitation and restraint. "There is time enough to arrange all that, afterwards, dear."

"But there is not," rejoined Emma, with gentle petulance. "You gentlemen don't know half the things, that ladies have to get ready."

"Think of one thing at a time," advised Bramley, not at all tenderly for one so recently betrothed. "Your present cue is

to leave Kidston with all decent speed, and join me in town."

"I suppose you know best, my love," assented Emma a little reluctantly; with a slight cloud over-shadowing her happy eyes.

"I am practical, which you are not, darling," laughed Bramley, as he sprang to shore, and lifted Emma out. "And now run home, my little girl, and take one, two, three, four good-byes; and come here again on Thursday, to tell me, how soon my aunt will let you go."

How Emma got to Kidston Manor that evening she never precisely knew; she walked in an enchanted atmosphere, and hardly seemed to feel the ground. She had never found the road one half so beautiful. The hedges seemed positively laden with flowers. The Manor was not such a bad place after all. Even her quaint, dim, ill-furnished attic, up in the rafters of the roof at Kidston, became full of gold and sunlight. Her homely dresses, hanging on the door, seemed to have grown absolutely glossy. Even Mrs. Rutherford herself

appeared, under the transmuting magic of love, an amiable and unoppressive personage.

Emma was in love for the first time, and first love presupposes absolute and entire reliance in the object of its adoration. She trusted Bramley utterly and with an undivided faith. She dreamt no harm of Bramley. She knew none. He seemed to her incomparably noble, in having overlooked her unworthiness and the lowliness of her origin. She could only think about him in superlatives. She brushed by Caroline Rutherford in the Kidston corridor, and absolutely pitied her. The glory of Gilbert Bramley's love made her head erect and her step elastic.

And so it went on for two days, during which Emma might be said to have lived among the visions and shadows of her first girlish illusion. To these the real men and women of Kidston Manor seemed the actual shadows. Her dreams were the realities of her life. And now the charmed Thursday was approaching, on which she was to meet her young hero once more,



among the river-lilies and the bladed flags at the enchanted bridge. Would the slow manor clocks ever roll out the creeping hours, that held her from that meeting?

But, so it chanced, that on Wednesday afternoon, Mrs. Rutherford, just before going out with Caroline and Jessie for her drive; sent a servant up to the school-room to ask, whether it would be convenient for Miss Klein, to take old Mrs. Bailey's broth and cape port wine, to her cottage in a back lane off the Blackwater Road. Emma gladly undertook the commission, accepted some days since; and, after a long walk and several false turns, succeeded in finding the hovel. Mrs. Bailey's home lay in a network of lanes, which seemed to lead no whither, and to come no whence. Emma had never extended her walks before so far on the Blackwater side of Kidston. She had always preferred for exploration the district towards the Garwood spire. But here the fields had a forlorn, weedy, exhausted look, the cottages were more ruinous and more squalid, and the few

peasants whom she met, seemed gaunt, hollow-eyed, broken-down souls. The township of Moston, in which Mrs. Bailey's cottage stood, was a kind of Nazareth to the Caropians of miserable tenements ; a debatable land between several large estates ; the respective owners of which hated its very name ; as a place that raised the union rates, and harboured the most notorious poachers. Mr. Wing had often *intended* to get there ; but, somehow, he had never succeeded as yet. The doctor, however, was in great request in these deplorable hovels ; but the general religious persuasion of this township might be fearlessly stated, as a persistent heathenism, mitigated by fitful anticipations of Christmas beef.

Emma Klein knocked at Mrs. Bailey's cottage-door, and, when bidden, entered. The occupants of the kitchen, or house-place, were three in number. Mrs. Bailey herself, bed-ridden upon a greasy bedstead in a corner by the fire. Not a prepossessing person was Mrs. Bailey, certainly. A wrinkled face the colour of mahogany, a lean knotted neck, and two bony hands

with long nails. That was all that appeared of this lady.

Nursing a baby over the fire sat Mrs. Bailey's grand-daughter. She had just got the child off to sleep with some stave, of which the burden ran, that the French should never come and drink old England dry. In the mean cottage-room, with its meagre furniture and low oppressive roof; with that hideous old wolf of a woman, moaning in the dim corner; in the midst of these squalid surroundings—the loveliness of Mrs. Bailey's grand-daughter struck Emma positively dumb. The purest type of English cottage beauty wore this girl. A type, alas, usually associated with consumption. A skin of fair and faultless rose and white—that clear, bluish, transparent white—eyes like the veronica, and soft light-brown hair. She was coughing terribly, poor thing, as Emma entered; and the weather-stains on the kitchen-walls showed, that a home, like Mrs. Bailey's must mean certain death in a few months to one in her condition. The baby also seemed weak and puny.

"I have brought you some wine and broth from the manor, Mrs. Bailey," began Emma, rather timidly.

"You may put it down," growled the elder invalid.

Mrs. Bailey, in common with the normal Cropshire peasant, was neither overwhelming in her thanks, or over-demonstrative in her gratitude.

"Fotch it here, Alice," said Mrs. Bailey greedily to her grand-daughter.

The old woman with a ravenous gesture plunged an iron spoon into the broth, smacked her withered lips like an ogress, and gave her opinion frankly, as a matter of course :—

"It's poor stuff."

Emma felt very awkward. The soup was not appreciated; and neither Mrs. Bailey nor her grand-daughter seemed to feel the necessity of making any remark.

"May I sit down?" asked Emma, really interested with the weird couple in spite of their repellent manners.

"I reckon you may," replied Alice, tucking the baby under one arm and dust-

ing a chair ; "though it's a poor place for the likes of you to sit in."

"How old is your baby ? may I nurse it ?" pursued Emma with a pitying glance.

The child was surrendered readily enough. When once in her arms, the poor thing began to laugh. Its smile somehow sent a thrill through Emma, which she could not account for. It reminded her of some one ; and the association was pleasant. She tried sedulously to make it smile again, but the baby grew restless and had to be quickly restored to its mother.

"Your cough is very bad," said Emma in a voice of sympathy.

"Yes," said the mother, in a feeble hopefulness ; "I trust to lose it as the summer goes on."

"But she won't," snarled out that consoling old heathen Mrs. Bailey, from her heap of bed-clothes. "My gals have all gone off in coughs, and she won't long continue. Ours is a poor place, and she is best out of it."

"Hush, grandmother," entreated Alice,

with a wild look, "I must try and live a little for the child's sake."

"She is the handsomest gal of all of them," whined the wolfish Bailey, who had a talent and specialty for cheering retrospect; "and much good it has done her! There was none like her on this countryside" (by the way, why is the country always described as a side?) "She got notice enough, and heard nonsense enough, and—there she is—nursing!"

Alice received these remarks with so little outward disturbance, that Emma rightly inferred, that Mrs. Bailey had often treated her grand-daughter to them before.

"It can't be helped now," returned the mother in a weary, dogged voice; and she began to rock the child and croon the old French defiance. But the terrible old woman held on unflinchingly in her diatribe:—

"It was a pity, ma'am, that Alice wasn't took, when she was such another child as that which she is holding. For then she would have never grown up to be a bad girl."

Alice sighed, and kissed her little lean baby. Emma felt a burning desire to smother that comfortable heathen, Mrs. Bailey, in her snuffy bed-clothes.

"I am sorry for you, Alice," said Emma with tears starting to her eyes. "May I come and see you again sometimes? I am only a governess and poor; but do let me leave you a few shillings?"

Alice seemed touched in turn. Emma produced her slender purse.

The worthy Mrs. Bailey became greatly excited—"What the ladies gives must be given to me, as I keep the home and pay the rent."

"Dreadful person!" murmured Emma, handing over the coin, which Mrs. Bailey received with a gurgle.

"Alice, dear, tell me your trouble," said Emma, taking her hand. "Is its father dead, dear?"

Alice's lips quivered, as they formed an almost whispered "no."

"Tell me, I am really sorry, Alice."

"Its father, miss, is a—gentleman."

A great dread came over Emma Klein.

All at once the likeness in the child's eyes flashed upon her.

"Hold me, Alice," she entreated to the girl, "for I am weak and ill, and feel as if I could die. Hold me up, Alice, and give me new life by whispering to me his name."

Alice gave a weary moan; and a faint blush overspread her beautiful mortal pallor. She then rose, and laid her lips at Emma's ear; and sighed again and even smiled a little, as she began to pronounce an inaudible name.

But Emma Klein lay senseless upon the cottage floor before Alice had ended.







## CHAPTER VII.

### DECIDES FOR THE HEIRESS.

“**A** NICE kettle of fish !” ejaculated Gilbert Bramley, whirling his cigar-end away into the fire-place. “A truly pleasant complication ! Had ever any fellow half my bad luck ?”

These passionate utterances were spoken at Brendon Park, Mr. Bramley’s own country seat ; and then Gilbert kicked his retriever off the hearth-rug, produced an open letter from his pocket, broke a wine-glass, and fired off a volley of oaths by way of a finale.

“The silly scatter-brain,” he grumbled, perusing the pages with a heated face ;

“ why on earth need Emma push her officious little footsteps along the back lanes of Moston ? And then my young lady must feel shocked at the morals of that primitive township. So she has seen Alice Bailey ; and Alice, not being troubled with reticence, confides her woes to the amateur district visitor. Whereupon, out dashes Miss Emma, I will wager, in a fury. There must have been quite a scene over your humble servant in the Moston Cottage that afternoon. Flattering rather, but very unpleasant. Then the little governess rushes home, grasps her pen, and indites these few lines,—short, icy, decisive. ‘ I have seen Alice Bailey by accident to-day ; all is over between us. I am only a governess : but I could not hate and scorn you more, if I were the daughter of a noble. For daring to make love to me, with this secret in your life,—I, Emma Klein, governess, denounce you, Gilbert Bramley, gentleman, as a mean and perfidious scoundrel.’ Pithy this, and wholly to the point. A consoling epistle. The poor little cat is nearly wild with jealousy. That’s one more good

turn which I owe you, Alice Bailey ! I am rather sorry about Emma, upon my honour, I am. I never met a girl who attracted me more. Well, well, I must persuade myself that all is for the best. I daresay she would have bored me in six months. What is to be done now ? I suppose, I must go in for the Kidston heiress, after all. Tiresome, very, this subsidence into matrimony. I meant to have allowed myself just one more escapade, before mossing over into paterfamilias. I don't care a button about Caroline Rutherford. I always suspect temper in women of that type. Well, two can play at that, and there will be plenty of room in this house, when her ladyship assumes the sullens. Still, it will make a magnificent property, if I can unite Kidston and Brendon. Why, the two will lie almost in a ring-fence. I have half a mind to propose to the heiress at once. She will take me, never fear. It will be rather a joke, for that spitfire, Emma, will run nearly demented at the news of my engagement. Hang it, that will be rich. If I do offer, I

will write ; it really is not worth boring myself to spout any more pretty speeches. I have made so many lately to the governess. Yes, I will be honest to Caroline, and write civilly and earnestly ; but she shall not be able to complain hereafter, that I made any parade of sentiment or of unalterable affection, and the similar moonshine current on such occasions. No, this girl, if she takes me at all, shall accept me with her eyes open, knowing perfectly well, that the marriage is one of the purest interest ; that, if it suits her to be mistress of Brendon in the present, it will suit my book extremely well to be master of Kidston Manor in the future."

So Bramley lit another cigar, and proceeded, in a much better humour, to sketch out such a letter at his writing-table.

Next day, Caroline Rutherford leant back pensively and in a reflective attitude in one of the bay windows at Kidston. On her knee lay a newly-opened letter ; she smiled softly to herself, as she perused once more its contents. Evidently her thoughts were of a pleasant nature.

“Good-bye to poverty,” ran the current of the young lady’s meditations, “farewell to the sordid conflict with hunger, to mean fears of quarter-day, to paring and saving, to scraping and scheming. I can hardly realize my good fortune. To be mistress of Brendon Park! A beautiful place, a spacious mansion, carriages and servants, jewels and luxuries. And then my Gilbert is so handsome, with it all. Had ever any girl better luck, or more reason to be thankful? Poor old parent, in the dust and dirt of Holloway, how this will gladden your dim spectacled eyes. Imagine, one brief month since I had no higher dreams than to subside into a doctor’s wife. Poor Edgar! He will be dreadfully cut up, but I have never quite forgiven him all those spiteful innuendoes against my Gilbert. A man may be jealous, but he ought never to be malevolent. Still, before I accept Mr. Bramley, I shall know the rights of these rumours from my aunt. And here, in good time, she approaches.”

“Well, Caroline,” beamed the banker’s wife, arriving from the garden, freighted

with roses, "you look as if your thoughts ran this morning to pleasant music. Why, my girl, you are absolutely radiant."

"Yes, aunt," replied Caroline, with rising colour, "I confess, that this letter has made me a very happy girl. It comes from—Brendon."

"You don't say so," exclaimed her aunt, at once perching herself down close to Caroline, and seizing both her niece's hands; "you never mean to tell me, that Gilbert Bramley has actually——"

Caroline nodded in a meaning way, and smiled a little.

"My dearest girl," vociferated Mrs. Rutherford, kissing her with effusion, "accept my most heart-felt congratulations. I also am supremely glad."

"It would never have happened," said Caroline gratefully, "if you and uncle had not so kindly asked me here."

"You are a credit to both of us," answered the aunt with fervour. "It struck me the first moment, I saw you in Gilbert's company, that you two were made for each other. Since then, it has been my sleeping

dream and waking prayer, that this union might come about. Have you written your reply, love?"

"Not yet, aunt dear," said her niece with a tinge of hesitation; "I have no mother, and I wish to consult you about Gilbert's letter. Please read it, every word."

"Very nicely put indeed," commented the banker's wife, after she had perused the proposal; "a sensible, gentleman-like, out-spoken declaration."

"But, aunt," doubted Caroline, rubbing her chin, "does this letter not strike you as just a little cold? There is no word about his being in love with me from end to end."

"Goodness gracious, Caroline!" cried her aunt, holding up both her hands, "that is the very point, which constitutes, to my mind, the perfect good taste and refined breeding of this offer. Why, any grocer's apprentice would begin at score about hearts, and true-lovers darts, and cupids, and turtle-doves. Pshaw, my dear, in our circles all that kind of thing is voted—second rate."

"But still," persisted Caroline, wavering just a little, "he might just say, that he cared about one."

"You fantastical and romantic girl," expostulated Mrs. Rutherford, shaking out her ringlets at her niece, "who would ask you to marry them, if they did not care about you? We always take the love for granted in our class, if the proposal be actually made. When a man in our circles does *not* mean to marry a girl, he then generally goes into a good deal of sentiment. Consequently, we, the upper ten, do not like emotional bouncing scenes of village courtship. And now, just read this sentence; Gilbert says, 'that he is convinced, that he will find in you a congenial partner; and he trusts, that you may find in him an amiable and considerate husband.' Now I consider, the tact and tone of those expressions are absolutely perfect."

"Well, aunt," agreed Caroline, with the faintest of sighs, "let that pass. I suppose, that I am behind the fashion on this point, and that Gilbert really likes me, though his language is rather frigid; but there is one



other subject, on which I have a delicacy in beginning even to you, aunt."

"My dear girl, speak out freely," encouraged the matron, patting her niece on the arm.

"I have heard rumours, aunt," Caroline stammered, perusing the pattern of the carpet, "about Gilbert; of a nature, which I do not even like to allude to."

"Then, my dear," advised the banker's wife a little constrainedly, "let us dismiss the subject and not pursue it further."

"But, aunt, are these rumours true?" and Caroline flushed deeply as she asked the question.

"All I know," replied the aunt evasively, drumming her foot on the floor, "is, that there was some forward flaunting girl of low origin in one of the lanes about here,—a daughter, I believe, of some tenant of his,—whom Gilbert was silly enough to chat with once or twice; and the creature got up a scandal about herself and Bramley, by trumpeting high and low a pack of lies concerning the poor boy. And, since you will have the story, there it is. But, my dear,

let me give you one sound piece of advice. We don't look a gift-horse in the mouth, and rich handsome husbands are none so plenty, that a girl can afford to poke and peer into every nook and cranny of such a lover's past ; and young men of property, let me conclude by saying, are not saints, and never will be such. And now, my dear, sit down, like a practical girl, and get your answer written ; as in these cases, it is very impolitic to keep a man waiting for a reply ; he might, who knows, change his mind, meantime."

"And yet," sighed Caroline, clasping her hands, "I do wish that Gilbert's name, either rightly or wrongly, had never been mixed up with this low girl's."

"Wishing," said the banker's wife with a sarcastic smile, "costs very little, and harms no one. So, my dear, you *may* wish. Still, I venture to say, that for his looks and income : Gilbert has been, when all is considered and due allowance made, remarkably steady. Just a leetle wild, he may have run, once or twice, but always in a gentlemanly manner. And now, I will

send to the stables, and have a horse ready saddled to carry back your acceptance."

Caroline placed her elbows on the table, and pressed her face down into both her hands. She remained for some moments plunged in reflection.

"I wish, that my dear old father was handy to advise me," she murmured at length, with a deep-drawn sigh.

"He could never go against his girl's interest," protested Mrs. Rutherford, with fervid impetuosity, "I can pronounce his verdict as confidently, as if he were in that arm-chair. Believe me, he would say, 'my child, accept and bless you.'"

"I suppose, that he would," returned Caroline, turning away her face. "So be it, aunt; I will write the letter as you wish me."

"You are a dear good girl," from the matron approvingly.

Caroline rose, and went across to the writing-table. She found a new quill pen, and a sheet of notepaper, stamped in red "Kidston Manor, Garwood." She added the date and began, "My dear Gilbert;"

and there the future mistress of Brendon Park paused.

Presently she murmured beneath her voice these words—

“ I wonder what poor Edgar will say, when he hears that I am to be married ?” and then, bending down again over the notepaper, she went on composing her letter to Gilbert Bramley.

What poor Edgar Lapworth did think upon the subject was conveyed to Caroline in an epistolary form, some three days thence. On coming down to breakfast at the manor, she found laid upon her plate a letter, with the village post-mark, in the hand of the village doctor. As Gilbert was then seated at her side, helping her to rolls and butter, and performing towards his betrothed all the little assiduities of the breakfast table : she could not well peruse her discarded admirer’s missive then. So she thrust it hastily into her pocket, and read it during the day. It ran as follows :

“ CAROLINE,

“ Miss Klein tells me, that you are engaged to Mr. Gilbert Bramley. My

misery on hearing this is greater than I can bear. Still I must write. May you be happy. God knows, I pen this wish honestly, fervently ; but, oh Caroline, my forebodings for your future, as that man's wife, are very dark indeed. If your word be not already finally and irrevocably given, I entreat you to pause, to draw back, while your feet are still upon the edge of the abyss. If your promise is passed, marry him and God help you. I have loved you better than ever he will ; but no single word of reproach do I utter against you. It is a brilliant marriage this for you, Caroline, as the world estimates such things. I had only a doctor's shop in a village street to offer you. You have chosen as nearly every other woman would. I cannot blame you. My earnest farewell prayer is, that your influence may make this man better than he has been. Farewell.

“ EDGAR LAPWORTH.”



## CHAPTER VIII.

### SKELETON KEYS.

**J**OSEPH BEHREND, the locksmith, yielded to the voice of Bellamy, the tempter ; so Christopher paid out the bailiff, prudently taking a written acknowledgment from Joseph for the amount of debt discharged. In his new position of creditor, one to which he was entirely unaccustomed, Christopher realized plainly, that the locksmith would become a passive instrument in his hands. Therefore, about three days afterwards, in accordance with his new creditor's summons, Behrends appeared on the platform at Paddington, with a flag basket, containing a goodly and highly

elaborate assortment of the implements of his craft. Christopher arrived soon after, and this strangely-assorted couple took train together to Waverton, a small station three miles short of Garwood. Since Bellamy felt, it would be highly impolitic, and even fool-hardy, to be seen by daylight in the latter place. Behrends was low and dejected during the journey down to Cropshire. Considering his errand there, this was not greatly to be wondered at. Christopher had undertaken no light task in the management of the bibulous locksmith. Joseph evinced a strong inclination to refresh himself unduly at each succeeding stopping-place on the route. Christopher saw that he must neither let Behrends get too low, nor, on the other hand, allow him to take too much. Either course might be fatal to the success of their enterprize. But it required all Christopher's tact to maintain in his companion, the happy mean between dejection and drunkenness. This entailed never losing sight of Joe for a moment, whenever and wherever the train stopped; coupled with an assiduous attendance at

Joe's elbow, to modify the orders given to the various young ladies, in a good deal of hair, and with pasty complexions, who presided over the liquor traffic along the Great Western Railway. Consequently, Christopher hailed with considerable relief the sound of "Waverton," pronounced in the purest Cropshire dialect. Here Behrends and his basket were got out of the train by Bellamy; who took the locksmith across forthwith to the small station inn, gave him some chops and tea, infused with a modicum of brandy, and got him off to bed for a few hours; having exacted a promise from Joseph, that he would not leave the house, until Christopher's return about half-past nine. At which time, Christopher would call for him, and they would at once proceed to action. Christopher then ordered round the one horse and gig of the station inn, which he retained for the rest of the evening; but said, he required no attendant to accompany him, as he could perfectly manage the horse alone. In this vehicle he presently drove away, having previously seen Joe safe between the sheets, and left stringent orders



in the bar, that if his friend awoke before his own return, that friend was to be supplied with nothing alcoholic.

We need hardly remind our readers, that this was the day of Signor Fresco's performance at the Garwood market-house. Christopher, as we know, meant to visit the Priory during this *séance* of natural magic, and purposed to enact a little conjuring up there on his own account. He had made a list at Garwood of all the Priory servants ; he had purchased, and now had posted to each by name overnight from town, a gratuitous ticket of admittance to that evening's entertainment. He had left, moreover, at his London hotel a telegraphic message already written out, which the boots was to dispatch at three that same afternoon. This, Christopher calculated, would reach the Priory about half-past five, and would draw the Squire up to London by the eight o'clock mail that same night. The telegram purported to be from Julia Bellamy, Sixteen, Arabian Crescent, to Harvey Esdaile, Esquire, Garwood Priory, most earnestly requiring his presence at her

house by ten the following morning, on most distressing family business, relative to a subject, about which she had previously consulted him.

So Christopher now left his accomplice, to ascertain, first, whether the squire would leave by the night mail ; next, whether the conjuring would begin at the appointed time; last, how many of the Garwood servants would go to that entertainment.

Then Christopher drove over the gig from Waverton to Garwood, and put it up at an obscure "jerry-shop," just short of the village. Thence, he avoided touching Garwood itself by a circuitous road, which brought him in due time into a paved lane; which actually bounded the Priory-park. On the park side of this highway, a deer-fence protected the squire's demesne from passing tramp and errant pedlar. This lane emerged into the high road at the Garwood Lodge ; and along it Christopher crept till he was within two hundred yards of this point of juncture. Here he paused and surveyed the ground with great interest. On the one side lay the palings of

the park, on the other a gate leading into a field with a high bramble hedge. Through this gate, and behind this hedge, Christopher determined to tether his horse and gig later on, while he and Joseph made their attempt.

The locksmith was anything but active on his feet. A gig, if left on this spot after nightfall, would not, ten to one, be seen ; and even, if seen, would not be greatly commented on. While, in case of misadventure in their undertaking, a conveyance would expedite greatly their retreat. So Christopher now, by daylight, took very exact bearings of the situation of this gate. This done, he cut out two of the park palings exactly opposite to it, since he misdoubted Joe's climbing powers ; and, having done this, he crept quietly through into the park, replacing the two cut palings in an upright position.

Once inside, Christopher found himself in a sea of bracken, five or six feet high. His sketching experiences had taught him every inch of the ground, and he crept on hands and knees through the fern, till he

came within twenty yards of the lodge itself. Here grew the bracken still as high as ever, and Christopher had previously found this very spot convenient, as a point from whence to watch unobserved the movements of the Priory family.

Here Christopher mounted guard for an hour without result. The lodge-girl hung out some linen on lines with pegs. The old lodge-keeper, Mrs. Meet, called and fed her poultry. At last came the ring of a horse's hoofs. Christopher, pulled the fern-stalks a little asunder, and discerned the Priory groom, whom he knew perfectly by sight, trotting down to the lodge with a letter. Christopher crept as near as he could with safety, and strained his ears to listen.

"What is up now, Sam?" said the lodge girl to the groom.

"The squire is off to London to-night, Ellen," returned the stable-boy.

"That's sudden," she observed, biting the corner of her apron.

"Some telegram," he explained, patting his horse's neck.

"Is that another telegram you have got?" asked the girl curiously.

"No, it is a letter for young Raymond, the lawyer," returned the rider, gathering up his reins.

"The squire is mighty fond of him," hazarded the portress, with a short laugh.

"He is that, Ellen."

"Are you going to the conjurer, Sam?"

"Yes, and a lot more."

Off the groom trotted down the road towards Garwood; and now Christopher crept back again to the cut palings, and then across the lane to the field, where he had left his gig. He had ascertained all that he required to learn. Everything was progressing admirably. The telegram was taking Esdaile on a fool's errand to town; his tickets were decoying the Priory servants to the conjurer's. A great load was taken off his mind, and his spirits rose accordingly. In half an hour he had rejoined Behrends at the Waverton inn, and found him still asleep.

It was now getting late, but he need not leave Waverton with Joe for another hour,

and even then he would be in ample time. So, having told the inn people, that he should require the trap again presently ; he took some rest himself upon a narrow rickety couch in the little parlour.

One thing alone occasioned him some anxiety. Why had Esdaile written to Philip Raymond and not to Lucas ? That the squire should inform his family lawyer of a sudden summons to town seemed natural enough ; that he should communicate such a fact to his lawyer's clerk seemed quite the contrary. Christopher pondered over this till it was time to get Joe out of bed, and ready dressed for departure. This was a matter of some difficulty, as the locksmith awoke in a most dejected frame of mind : and had to be supplied with stimulants, before he could be induced to get his clothes on. At last he was ready, and Christopher suggested, that he should carefully overhaul the instruments in his basket, as a last precaution before they set forth.

"I don't like this job," groaned Joe, trying a kind of long hook against his nail ;

"I would give twenty pounds to be back in Barrett's Court, Marylebone."

"Folks don't like physic," Christopher urged, with a laugh, "yet they take it. Remember, you will never see Barrett's Court, at least in a furnished state, unless you do this job; so don't drivel about being back there."

"The things are all right, Mr. Eyserbeck," reported Joe, with a reluctant gasp, at length setting down his basket. "Oh, Lord! this is terrible!"

"There won't be a soul in the house," encouraged Christopher, with a hand on the shoulder of the stooping man.

"One never knows," whined the locksmith, with chattering teeth.

"I fancy that we shall know fast enough, under certain circumstances," laughed Christopher, by way of grim rejoinder.

"You are an awful man, Mr. Eyserbeck," answered Joe, with a face as long as his basket, and nearly as colourless. "You seem hardly human, you do!"

"I'm your paymaster," sneered Christopher; "that is all respecting myself that

need concern you. I pay you certain pounds for a job—and to your skill an easy job, if you are not disturbed—which you won't be."

"That is the rub," said the locksmith, flashing up into faint self-assertion, "picking a lock at home is one thing, working, so to speak, under fire, is another. Suppose the butler comes down with a pistol, and the footman runs in with a blunderbuss! Mercy on us, Mr. Eyserbeck, what shall we do then?"

"Here is a recipe," observed Christopher, laughing in his sleeve, "a sure means by which to preserve your mental composure over this job. Imagine yourself at work all the time in Barrett's Court, and the thing is done."

"I can't make believe to that extent," protested Joseph, with very dismal intonation.

"Then, it is evident to me," said Belamy, in a tone of detraction, "that you are afraid, after all, of this Bramah lock mastering you, and that I have only hit upon a second-rate workman."



"Never," exclaimed Behrends, on his mettle at last ; " show me any mortal lock, that I am afraid of !"

" So I will, old fellow," nodded Christopher, giving him a push ; " here comes the gig round, and I will lead you to your antagonist. If you are baffled, don't ever look a brother-locksmith in the face again. Now, let us be off."

Joe was hoisted up into the inn vehicle, Christopher grasped the reins, and away they drove into the night. They arrived in half an hour at the gap in the park palings. Here they got out. Christopher led the gig through the gateway opposite, and tied the horse by the head to a stump of black-thorn inside the field ; where the hedge rose thickest, and masked the vehicle. Then they shut to the gate, and Joe crept after him through the palings into the park bracken ; hence they crawled to the previous hiding-place near the lodge, and waited as before.

" I want," whispered Christopher, when they were comfortably ensconced in their nook of observation, " to count how many

servants go by to the conjurer's. This is a most important point in our precautions. You must help me, Joe ; direct your attention to number only and sex : that is to say, how many men you reckon, and how many maids. I shall attend to voices and faces as well, so as to identify, if I can, the missing ones by name."

"How soon will they come by?" demanded Joe, shivering.

"In ten or twenty minutes by my calculation," replied Christopher, producing his watch.

"Give us a drop out of that flask of yours," entreated the locksmith, as he sat crouched ; with his knees drawn up towards his chin, and his hands locked across his knees.

"Just a drain then," agreed Christopher, grudgingly producing the bottle ; "remember, you will want it most when you are at work. That is enough. Have done, man."

And Christopher wrenched away the flask from his companion's lips, that had closed upon it like a limpet.

"Hush, I hear steps and voices."

"Yes, here they come; now, Joe, count."

Several detachments of figures approached laughing and chattering down the road; then, filing through the lodge-gate, went on towards the village.

"Well, Joe, what is your reckoning?"

"Six maids and four men."

"Quite correct, Joe, but not greatly encouraging."

"How?"

"Three men short."

"Hush, here are wheels!"

Then a brougham approached, and passed out after the servants.

"Capital, Joe!" exclaimed Christopher, rubbing his palms, "that reduces the missing men to one. I might have known, that the coachman and footman would have to wait for the Garwood ladies in their carriage. We are in glorious luck; Up guards and at 'em, victory is ours. They have only left the pantry boy in charge, and the Priory is our own for the

next three hours ; and, if you cannot burst Bramah in that time, you are no locksmith."

"Forty minutes, I require," said Joe, rising slowly to his feet, and dusting his knees. "That is my time for one of their first-rate locks, fifteen minutes will do for a second class apparatus."

"Step along then, my Trojan," urged Christopher, seizing Joseph's arm ; and the two men walked through the dusk towards the Priory at a brisk pace.

"Now," pondered Christopher, when they were close to the house, "shall we risk the page, or shall I lure away the boy after the others?"

"Get him away by all means," counselled Joe ; "I shall then work, as if I were in Barrett's Court. My imagination is improving. Just one drop more, Mr. Eyserbeck, would render it equal to anything."

"Then hold a light here while I scribble something," said Christopher, producing a scrap of paper and a pencil.

Bellamy then managed to write as


follows, while Joe directed the fitful gleams of a bull's-eye lantern over the paper.

"Thomas, I am sorry that you alone should miss the conjurer ; come down and see him, if you like, but lock the front door carefully ; and then no one will be able to hurt the house, while you are away.

" CLEMENTINA ESDAILE."

" Now walk up stoutly," enjoined Christopher, patting Joe on the shoulder ; " ring the kitchen bell. Say, when the boy appears, that you are one of the conjurer's men and have brought this note from his mistress ; and then creep back to me under these lilac bushes, whence we can watch the result. They know me by sight, so I dare not deliver this message myself."

Joseph, thus adjured, disappeared with the paper. Christopher heard the bell ring and then a muttered colloquy. Presently the door shut, and Joe came back on tiptoe under the masking shrubs of the parterre.



"All right, at least I believe so," he panted, on rejoining his accomplice; "the boy says, his mistress is very kind, he is sure."

"He will be out in a few minutes," murmured Christopher exultingly; "that was an artistic touch of mine about locking up safe."

Here the kitchen door opened, A short stumpy form came out. It proceeded to turn the key in the door-handle, and passed after the rest, flourishing the same key and whistling cheerily.

"'Tis a sharp lad," observed Christopher with sneering emphasis, "he takes the house-key with him for extra caution. Now, my prince of picks, we have only to walk in, take our time, and help ourselves."

"Are there any dogs left?" hazarded Joe, stepping rather gingerly; "they would not go to the conjurer."

"My dear fellow," laughed Christopher, pushing his comrade forward, "what do dogs signify, if there is no one to hear them?"

"They bite," rejoined Joe, wrapping his

great-coat tails closely round his lower man.

Bellamy led the way noiselessly to a pantry window in an angle of the wall, about twenty yards from the kitchen door. By merely inserting his knife between the upper and lower sash, and then pushing with the blade, he deftly and easily forced the window-bolt backwards. It was one of the simplest country make. Up went the window, and in a second Christopher stood inside the Priory. Then followed Behrends' basket of implements, the lanterns, a bundle of candles, and lastly Behrends himself. Once within, both took their boots off, which they added to their other bundles. Noiselessly they left the pantry, followed the long passage leading on to the library; thence they entered the library itself. Not a sound had they heard inside the house. The place seemed utterly deserted. They flashed their dark lanterns upon the pictured lines of deceased Esdailes, who seemed to glare down from their frames with surprise at the intruders. The library was softly and richly carpeted.

They traversed its length like cats. At its furthest extremity Christopher advanced and laid his fingers on his lips. With his unoccupied hand he touched an iron door, and beckoned Behrends stealthily.

"Light the candles," said Behrends briskly, who had knelt down without more ado at the lock. The man seemed completely changed ; he was lost in the workman. His eagerness to master the lock seemed quite to merge all thoughts of his own individual danger. He began rapidly inserting one of his long hooks after another into the orifice. Then out came a thing like a key that had lost half its wards. Then another skeleton utensil. Then he resorted to a jumble of long hooks upon a ring. Suddenly he stopped, looked up, and wiped the drops from his brow.

"Well," demanded Christopher breathlessly.

"This is the first class," whispered Behrends, not interrupting his work for an instant. "I shall want full forty minutes, if I want a second. There are not three men in England that could open that lock,"



he concluded in a tone of actual triumph, and buckled down to his task again with headlong alacrity.

Christopher hailed with exultation the change which had come over his associate. There was nothing left of the irresolute drunkard. There was an actual dignity in the eagerness, firmness, and dexterity of the man. He was fighting a lock alone; external circumstances were forgotten. He brought the study of a life to the encounter, and he gloried in exercising to perfection the one strange gift of his broken misspent life.

"Then forty minutes you shall have," said Christopher, producing a pistol; "I will watch the library door, and, if any one interrupts you, it shall only be over my body."

"More light, Mr. Eyserbeck, please," panted Joseph, without even looking up, and away he worked at a great pace.

Christopher lit five more ends of wax candles, each about three inches long, and arranged them in quite a tasteful little row; so as to concentrate their whole light upon

the point where the locksmith was working.

"There," exclaimed Christopher, taking a step backwards, "quite a pretty effect. An illumination on a small scale. This corner must look just like a little oratory from the other end of the library. And you, Joe, drudging away on your knees, are a worshipper at the shrine of—who shall we say?"

"Bramah," replied the locksmith without pausing.

"Did you mean that for a joke?" enquired his associate with a sardonic grin.

But Joseph Behrends was so immersed in his task, that he neither heard nor heeded his questioner.

"Now," continued Christopher, "you work away, my friend; trust to me and this little fire-arm to keep away intruders."

Joseph bent to his work with redoubled energy. His basket seemed to furnish—one after another—broken key, hook, prong, blade, and screw; instruments like a dentist's; appliances like a carpenter's. Things were produced like dumpy fingers, things

like the limbs of a daddy-longlegs ; things that went round all sorts of impossible corners, things of strange curves. But, after all, the skeleton key, and the long thin iron hook, with innumerable modifications of each, were the two leading types, on which nearly all Joseph's other instruments were founded. Now he pushed, now he screwed. At one time he prised, at another he filed. The energy of the man seemed indomitable. Great beads of perspiration burst out upon his forehead. Yet he never raised his eyes from his work.

"How goes it?" demanded Christopher from his guard post at the library door. "Had you not better have a drain from my flask?"

"No brandy for me," whispered Behrends resolutely, "it is better than any spirit ever distilled, to be fighting my friend here. A nobler lock never was forged ; but I shall beat him in ten minutes, poor fellow. It's almost a shame, he is making such a good fight. Is all quiet outside?"

"Right as rain," replied Christopher,

pushing his head beyond the door to listen; "one of the watch-dogs has a suspicion, that it is not all shipshape. Howl away, old fellow, nobody minds you. Crack your throat, for all I care."

"You had best come near me now," said Behrends, after another pause of five minutes, "stand here and be ready. I'm just through. He is dying hard, though. I am filing away his last vital. One more push, a few more turns of the hand, and——"

Noiselessly the iron door of Garwood strong room lay open. Behrends began to gather up his instruments in a matter of fact way, as if he had just concluded some ordinary job in the craft of a locksmith.

"A hundred pounds are yours, Joe—you are a magnificent workman."

And Christopher sprang inside, candle in hand. A single glance round showed him the japanned deed box which he recollected in Lucas's office. It was newer than the rest, of which there were about a dozen. It was labelled also, "Harvey Esdaile, Esq., High St., Garwood." Only two other boxes

bore Harvey's name, and they differed in having it followed by "Garwood Priory." The other chests belonged to deceased Esdailes, of whom Christopher had never heard.

"Here is a bit of child's-play for you, Joe," said Christopher, indicating the deed-box described; "just knock this fellow open for me."

Joe made very short work of his second antagonist, a mere padlock. Up came the lid with a creak, exhaling a musty smell of parchment and damp papers.

"Hold the candle, Behrends," ejaculated Christopher, while he plunged his hands, quivering with eagerness, into the contents of the box; and began rapidly baling out the documents, one by one, upon the floor. "Bring the candle closer, man; shall we never find it? 'Lease to Vidler.' Damn Vidler! 'Memorandum of my uncle's will.' Hang your uncle! 'Marriage settlement of Wilfred Esdaile.' Infernal sailor! 'Conveyance to Orphan hospital.' Choke the fatherless brats! Will it never come? Ah, by the blue fury, here it is! Victory! Treble

and complete. Confusion and utter smash to Esdaile, Julia, and the rest. Hurrah! Twenty times a hundred cheers. Joe, king of locksmiths, your hand. Regard it! The damnable instrument that has driven me, like Cain, over half the civilized world for twenty years past. 'Proofs and memoranda in the matter of Christopher Bellamy.' Victory!" And Christopher brandished on high in triumph a folded parcel about the size of a school-boy's felt hat.

"And now to escape," he exclaimed, his face radiant with exultation. "Bundle up your traps, Joseph, and stick close to my heels. The rest is as easy as lying! Come along."

As silently as they came, Christopher and his comrade re-traversed the library, the long passage, and the pantry. Christopher's hand was already raising again the window by which they entered, when, to the consternation of both, steps were heard approaching upon the gravel outside.

"We are lost!" faltered Joe, nearly dropping his bundle in an extremity of terror. He had no work to forget himself

in now. He had relapsed into a nerveless, tremulous drunkard.

"It is only one man," said Christopher, flattening his face against the window. "Stay where you are, Joe, if you move hand or foot you are lost. Leave me to deal with this intruder."

Christopher planted himself in darkness at the pantry door, and produced a short stout cudgel from his pocket.

The step outside came on to the kitchen entrance. A key was placed in the lock. It yielded. The door swung open; the man walked straight in. Along the passage came the figure, within a foot of the pantry door, where Christopher lay like a tiger in wait, pistol in one hand, cudgel in the other. Had the man turned from the passage into the pantry, Christopher would assuredly have shot him dead; but the intruder's better fates prevailed, and he did *not* turn into the pantry.

In the hundredth division of a second, it flashed upon Christopher to let the man pass uninjured, as there was plenty of time for them to escape, before the new-comer



was likely to discover their depredations. In the next hundredth division of the same second, the back of the intruder's head looked so temptingly close to Christopher's cudgel, as it passed, that, with one well-directed blow, he had felled the stranger senseless to the earth.

Behrends gave a low groan of terror.

"A light," said Christopher, hastily; "a light here at once. The man is harmless, and will be so for some minutes. Let us see, at least, what kind of game we have brought down, before we decamp."

They turned the prostrate form over, and flashed a dark lanthorn on the pale features.

"Young lawyer Raymond!" ejaculated Christopher, letting the head drop again roughly; "and serve him richly right, for meddling where he has no business."

"Is he dead?" asked Behrends, hoarsely, bending down.

"Not a bit of it," cried Christopher, with an oath; "he will be up and shouting in ten minutes. Meantime, he has made our exit easy, by leaving open the kitchen door. Now, old man, a short burst of a quarter of



a mile, and we shall be back, snug and comfortable, in our gig, victorious on all points."

And the two accomplices disappeared into the darkness, leaving Philip Raymond senseless on the passage flags.





## CHAPTER IX.

### OVER THE WOUNDED.

**L**ET us retrace the events of this narrative by an hour or so, and endeavour to explain, how Philip managed to land himself in the awkward predicament, in which the conclusion of our last chapter left him.

In common with the rest of the gazing town of Garwood, Philip had flocked in to see the conjurer. It is marvellous, how little will attract the inhabitants of our rural districts to pay down their shilling. Philip did not love conjurers much, but he loved Violet Esdaile more, and he thought she might possibly attend the magical performance.

Signor Fresco, an Irishman of the name

of French, with his English broken expressly for that evening's entertainment, then commenced his feats. We suppose, that the wizard charged for the broken English in the admission fee—for certainly the rest of the performance, exclusive of this item, was hardly worth the money demanded at the doors—on the hypothesis, that, as a foreigner, the rustics would more easily credit him with demoniacal powers than as an Irishman ; Mr. French changed his nationality, as he did his coat, just before the performance began.

Philip had received, late in the afternoon, a hurried note announcing that the squire had been telegraphed for up to town, on the same business, which had lately so occupied them both. The note concluded by a hope, that Philip would maintain a bright look out at Garwood during the squire's absence. After the receipt of this message, Philip felt himself in a measure responsible while Mr. Esdaile was away, for things going right both in the village and up at the Priory.

So, while Signor Fresco was cooking the

inevitable omelet of necromancy in the Reverend Mr. Wing's hat, a sensation was created in the room by the arrival of Mrs. Wilfred Esdaile ; who came in with a good deal of unnecessary rustle, and subsided, all smiles and affability, into a front place. But no Violet followed in her mother's wake, much to Philip's, and, we may add, to Paul Wing's disappointment. The curate was certainly looking doleful and woebegone after his recent refusal. He was, moreover, fidgety about his hat, lest the cooking should spoil its gloss. He was also anxious to ascertain, whether Mrs. Wilfred would recognize him after his recent behaviour to her daughter. He had felt all day the phantom hand of Westcott, the university tailor, on his shoulder. So, as a refuge from graver cares, he had taken a shilling's worth of mild magic with the rest of his flock.

Undistracted by the presence of Violet, and not greatly edified by the production of eggs from Eavestaffe's bandana silk handkerchief ; Philip fell to making various reflections. Among these, it occurred to him that nearly all the Priory servants were

present at the performance. He therefore crushed his way across to the seat of the groom who had brought him the letter, and demanded of him who was left in charge at the Priory. The servant replied, that the page-boy was taking care of the house, and that Miss Violet had gone to bed early with a cold. Philip thought this delegation of the entire responsibility of a large house to a lad extremely imprudent. Still he did not like to interfere on the vague injunctions of the squire's letter. So he dismissed the subject, and witnessed with faint interest a few more tricks ; when, to his surprise, who should join the audience but the page-boy himself, who had been reported in charge of the Priory. Philip hesitated no longer, but retiring forthwith, collared the delinquent youth in the doorway, and led him out into the High Street, to explain his conduct in deserting his post. The boy protested with many tears, that Mrs. Wilfred had written him a special invitation to join the other domestics ; this explanation Philip dismissed as an ingenuous falsehood of the page's. The boy pro-

ceeded to explain, that he had made all fast and sure before he came away, producing the great house-key to prove his words. Philip instantly showed him, that he had locked up Miss Violet, among other less important chattels, and vehemently stigmatized the youth's conduct as disgraceful. The page, who had really quite forgotten Violet upstairs, at once professed his readiness to return, and Philip decided, that they would go together. At least, he reflected, that he might watch so far over Violet's safety without intrusion, and so off they trudged in company. As Philip and the page approached the Priory windows, the boy declared that he saw a light in the library. Philip ascribed this to a moonbeam on the pane; but the boy became frightened, and refused to re-enter the house, so Philip took the house-key from his unwilling fingers, and went forward alone. He unlocked the kitchen door, and was proceeding along the passage, when something like a hundred stars seemed to dance before his eyes, and he remembered no more.

Philip uttered no cry when he fell, and

the escape of Christopher and Joseph was so silently effected, that the boy, hearing no sound, and, supposing that Philip had found all right inside the house, took courage to enter after him by the open kitchen-door. To the page's intense terror, he stumbled, after a few yards of progression in the darkness, over the prostrate form of Philip himself ; whereupon the boy made no more ado, but rushed howling up to Violet's room. She had meant to sit up for her mother's return, and was at that moment reading a novel in her dressing-gown. Suddenly, she heard a rushing upstairs, accompanied by loud laments ; and presently the page-boy burst in upon her, and cried out, with no further preface, that there had been thieves in the house, and they had murdered Mr. Philip Raymond in the kitchen-passage.

Violet's only idea in her great terror was the first and only thought of every good and unselfish woman. Some one was sick, hurt, dying or dead, and in need of instant help. Her only reply to the terrified boy was, " I am coming ;" and, seizing a candle

from her dressing-table, she rushed, with steps that scarcely faltered, to the kitchen-passage ; and in less than one minute from her first alarm, was bathing Philip's pale brows with her moistened pocket-handkerchief. Her presence of mind seemed contagious; the boy became calmed by her example, and was able to fetch a glass of wine under her orders from the pantry cupboard. Presently, Philip began to show signs of returning consciousness. Violet uttered an exclamation of thankfulness, and continued to bathe his face assiduously. Soon she managed to make him swallow a few drops of the wine. Presently, his eyes opened. He did not know the least where he was, but it seemed to him very sweet indeed, to find Violet Esdaile bending over him. He could not explain it ; he did not wish to have it explained. It was a dream probably ; but let him dream like this for ever. He felt weak and ill, but the great joy of believing that Violet was nursing him, mastered the weakness and the sickness, and made his return to consciousness a vision of Elysium.



"Violet," he murmured, "don't leave me."

Now that the crisis was over, Violet gave way, and she burst in a flood of grateful tears.

Philip, only partly conscious, raised his languid arms, drew her unresisting face down to his, and so first their lips met.

At this moment, the page returned with some more wine, and Violet, deeply blushing, started back into an upright position. Her tears fell softly and silently, as she went on bathing Philip's forehead. At this juncture, wheels approached the front door, followed by a hurried talk, and rapidly advancing footsteps. In a moment, the coachman, the footman, and last not least, Mrs. Wilfred Esdaile appeared in the passage, each bearing a lighted taper.

The situation was striking, Violet in her pretty dressing-gown, with her hair fallen about her shoulders, bending in tears over the wounded Philip, the page-boy on his knees blubbering, and holding out a glass, Mrs. Wilfred, rigid and stony with astonishment, in the back-ground ; both footman

and coachman behind her, looking, as if a very little more would make them both take to their heels.

Presently vexation and anger seemed to overpower the widow's astonishment.

"Get up from those flags this instant, Violet," she shrieked, "have you taken leave of your senses? Why could not young Mr. Raymond have his fits out somewhere else?"





## CHAPTER X.

### THE VILLAGE AROUSED.

**W**HEN the report reached the village, that the strong room at the Priory had been broken open, and Philip Raymond nearly murdered, the excitement in Garwood knew no bounds. Garwood was just going to bed after its conjuring, when the Priory coachman galloped into the High Street with the news. And when the populace beheld Culf, mounted up behind the coachman on the carriage horse, to be taken back full speed to the scene of action ; and when Lucas Raymond with Lapworth presently took the same direction in the doctor's gig—the news spread like wild-fire, and Garwood, *en*

*masse*, determined to celebrate the event by not going to bed: and by making a night of it in the leading publics of the town; the owners of which establishments felt, that they were more than justified in keeping their houses open beyond legal hours on so thrilling an occasion.

Bradbeer had gone to bed prematurely, leaving Culf, as usual, to do the work; so that, when Mrs. Bradbeer had with difficulty wakened her spouse sufficiently to realize any perception of what had taken place, Culf had already started twenty minutes since for the Priory; and had filched from the forehead of his superior officer the laurels of a first arrival on the scene of the depredation. Bradbeer consoled himself, during his hasty toilet, by reflecting, that, even had he been up, he must have delegated this honour to his subordinate; inasmuch, as he was too portly to have adopted Culf's rapid means of convoy behind the Priory stableman.

While Bradbeer was dressing, in rushed Eavestaff, the grocer, with further news. He told the constable, how the robbers had

invited every servant at the Priory gratis to the conjurer's ; and that, by this means, they had remained for hours in a deserted house, during which time, they had leisurely effected their designs. Now, when Bradbeer heard this, a great thought struck him ; plainly these bandits and this conjurer were in league. He would outwit Culf yet ; and, though his junior was so ready to gallop over the county on carriage horses, Bradbeer's brain would master Culf's mere physical activity ; for Bradbeer would reap the real glory, by the first arrest of one of the parties implicated. Great, therefore, was the sensation in the bar and at the doors of the " Headless Woman," and many were the admiring comments on the promptitude of the police ; when Bradbeer, now clothed and swelling with importance, marched into that public house ; and, after calling on all good men and true to assist him in case of resistance, proceeded upstairs to one of the bedrooms ; and took into immediate custody, the sleeping form of the unhappy Fresco, the conjurer ; whom he roused, vainly protesting his innocence, and

marched away half-dressed to the Garwood lockups. The prisoner was escorted thither by the whole tag-rag of the town, who heaped every imaginable insult on the shivering conjurer by the way. Having safely immured the magician, Bradbeer was loudly cheered; and a gig being forthcoming, that officer then followed Culf up to the Priory; whither he jogged with deep inward satisfaction at the effectual manner, in which he had taken the wind out of his subordinate's sails.

At the Priory, Bradbeer found, that Lucas, Lapworth, and Culf had already made their investigation. They had telegraphed for the squire, but nobody in the house could detect anything as missing. The plate-chests in the strong room were untouched, only one deed-box had been opened, and its contents lay littered about the floor. Culf and the others believed, that Philip's opportune arrival had disturbed the robbers before they could get at the plate; but when Lucas recognized the open deed-box, as the one which the squire had so unaccountably moved from the Garwood

lawyer's office, he began to suspect some deeper mystery at the bottom of this burglarious entry.

Philip's wounded head had been examined and dressed by his ally the doctor. Lapworth, after his surgical inspection, had insisted upon the young lawyer's being kept perfectly quiet for the next few hours. Lapworth, accordingly, undressed Philip in one of the Priory guest-bedrooms, and rigidly forbade any questions being addressed to his friend at present. The doctor, however, had been able to assure Violet, whose anxiety on this point it was distressing to witness, that he did not believe, that Philip's injury was such as to justify any grave apprehension. Thus consoled, Violet retired to her room and again lay down, thoroughly worn out by the agitation of recent events. Mrs. Wilfred, at this juncture, was found by the elder lawyer and the doctor to be much more of a hindrance than a help. The widow protested wildly, that she knew all about it, and had expected for days that something serious would occur. That she had never

written to the page-boy, and would not so demean herself. That it was just like Harvey to leave her alone to cope with these burglars. That the squire and Mr. Philip had been plotting together day and night during the last week. That much good these fine machinations had resulted in. That any one could get their house robbed by keeping bad company. That there was a governess in blue, who walked into Garwood every afternoon and bought copy-books: who, the widow felt convinced, was in direct communication with this gang of housebreakers!

All this sounded so wild, rambling, and incoherent, that Lucas felt he could do nothing but fold his hands and wait. Bradbeer then arrived, and announced, that he had arrested the conjurer Fresco, on suspicion of complicity with the gang. Lucas neither commended nor reproved him for this step. Culf thought the conjurer would not have gone to bed if guilty, but Bradbeer laughed this suggestion to scorn; as such feigned somnolency only proved the magician's greater deepness. Matters being



thus at a standstill, Bradbeer begins to reflect, that the Priory ale in the servants' hall is of noted excellence. In the cause of duty, the inspector believes, that he might be enabled to pass the night very comfortably on the premises. A certain farmer, Doorcast, arrives, announcing that he has impounded in one of his fields, adjoining Garwood Park, about ten that evening, a horse and trap, belonging by the tax name to the Station inn at Waverton. This gig he, Doorcast, has driven up on the chance of its connection with the robbery, which he has only just heard of. Lucas commends Doorcast, and for want of other resource, all descend to inspect the gig. Culf clambers into it with a lighted tallow candle; examines the bottom of the vehicle, and finds a small locksmith's instrument in the corner. This puts the matter beyond doubt. Culf and Lapworth at once drive off to Waverton in this very gig, to gain at the inn descriptions of the robbers.

After they are gone, Lucas dozes, and Bradbeer descends to the servants' hall;

where the housemaids are greatly impressed, both by the inspector's profundity in the theoretical detection of crime, and with that official's very remarkable capacity for voluminous consumption of malt liquor.

About three in the morning, Philip woke up quite himself in one of the Priory bedrooms. At his earnest request, the housekeeper, who was sitting up with him, fetched his uncle to his bedside. Philip then told Lucas, that the man named Eyserbeck, who had been hanging about the village for so long, was unquestionably the author of the robbery. The squire had feared such an attempt for some time, and had taken all reasonable precautions to frustrate its success; but that Eyserbeck had been too clever for both of them. Eyserbeck was no ordinary robber; he did not come for plunder, but for certain documents, which he had evidently succeeded in abstracting. Philip concluded by saying, that Eyserbeck must have watched behind the pantry door, and as he, Philip, passed, felled him to the earth with some blunt stick or a crowbar.

Then Lapworth and Culf returned soon

after from Waverton, quite corroborating Philip's account. Two men had come down that afternoon from London and taken out the inn gig. One, obviously Eyserbeck from description ; the second, much older, had a workman's rush basket, which evidently must have contained the implements, necessary for picking the strong room lock. The landlord at Waverton Inn had, of course, seen no more of his visitors.

On Lucas informing Bradbeer, that his nephew indicated Eyserbeck as the author of the robbery, and that this news from Waverton confirmed beyond doubt such a supposition, Bradbeer said very calmly, that he had always known this foreigner was up to no good ; then the damning evidence of the ground-plan of the Priory—found in Eyserbeck's bedroom, and overlooked in the hurry of the first discovery,—was remembered by Culf, much to Bradbeer's disgust, who had not recalled the circumstance. Pending the squire's return, descriptions of Eyserbeck, and a reward for his apprehension, were telegraphed early that morning by Lucas to Scotland Yard, and to every

railway station within twenty miles round Garwood.

Philip was reported nearly well, and Violet had almost regained her ordinary composure. There seemed, therefore, nothing further to be done; but to await the squire's return from London, before taking more stringent measures to catch Eyserbeck and his companion.

Lucas suggested that Fresco might be enlarged upon bail, as nothing indicated in any way his complicity; but upon this point Bradbeer was adamant. Fresco and Eyserbeck were both foreigners, and this was a foreign plot, in which they each had inserted their outlandish fingers.





## CHAPTER XI.

### AN ADDER IN THE LING.

**C**HRISTOPHER and Joseph crept away across the park, and then through the palings ; but great was their dismay to find, that their gig had unaccountably disappeared. Christopher at once realized, how this misadventure would treble the difficulties of their escape, as time was gold to them just now. Waverton was a good three miles off, they were on foot, and the roads were bad. In his present condition, Behrends could hardly reach Waverton, walking, under an hour. Before then, his name and description might have been telegraphed to every neighbouring station,

Waverton among the rest. The whole problem was this ; how long would Philip Raymond lie there unconscious or undiscovered ? For the life of him, Christopher could not hope for more than half an hour, before the hue and cry would begin.

He was a resolute man, and his decision was taken in an instant. He must change his return route. He did not dare walk back to Waverton. Now that his turn was served by the locksmith, he cursed Joe Behrends as a useless incumbrance, who made escape doubly hazardous. But every moment was precious ; he must give up any thoughts of getting on the railway to-night. Garwood and Waverton stations were closed to him. All the others were miles away. He must lie close in barns and ditches for a day or two, like any other ordinary tramp.

Cottages and inns would be perilous. Stay, he had it though ! The solution flashed in upon his brain all at once. Kidston was the very place of refuge. Who would look for him there ? Rutherford, his old associate in guilt, should shelter

him *nolens volens*. Ho ! for Kidston then. But Joseph ? He must cast Joseph loose. Rutherford's patience would fail under a brace of malefactors. No, Joe must shift for himself. It was selfish policy rather, but necessity has no laws. And Christopher, all through life, had loved number one much more than his neighbour.

They began trudging mechanically and dejectedly back towards Waverton. Christopher felt a certain awkwardness, in explaining verbally to an associate, who had just rendered him such eminent services, that he was going to desert him ; so he resolved to let deeds announce to Joseph Behrends the course which he now intended to pursue. Watching his opportunity, when the next lane cut across their road, Christopher purposely lagged behind. Then he darted off at a furious pace to the right up the side by-way. Before Joseph Behrends had a suspicion, he was gone ; Christopher had disappeared into the surrounding gloom.

Basset Rutherford, the banker-squire, sat in his study at Kidston Manor on the

morning succeeding the inroad upon the muniment room of Squire Esdaile. As when we saw him last, Basset was working under high pressure, at an hour when, in most country houses, only the housemaids are astir. But day and night the brain of the capitalist seethed with gigantic visions of commercial enterprise. Each day's post added to his writing-table schemes of new railways, new docks, new loans; already Basset believed, that a seat in the legislature would be his own, if for one moment he could rest on his commercial oars, and hold up one finger to the world of politics.

This morning he felt sanguine and serene. He had attended a missionary meeting in Blackwater overnight, for the purpose of converting the Irish Priesthood. There he had denounced the pope in terms, which would have greatly surprised that amiable gentleman in person. He had dined previously in a goodly company of divines, fat, well-to-do personages, with a good deal of shirt-front, and massive gold chains. These gentlemen drove up in their own carriages, and did not dis-



relish a glass of tawny port. They, one and all, had treated the banker with an almost servile deference. These smug and portly celebrities seemed to think, that camels did get through needles' eyes every day of the weekly seven. At any rate, it was a pity, that the police did not remove an infectious, they might add, indecent leper, who had pestered them on the steps of their carriages. Really, a man in that state ought not to be allowed to remain in the thoroughfare of a Christian country.

Then Basset went on to reflect, with a satisfied smile stealing across his features, that he had turned in a cool two thousand yesterday in a Blackwater cotton transaction; and that he then held confidential information, which, if dexterously utilized, would enable him to net some hundreds more; when, through the open window, there fluttered in a strip of shabby paper, which fell at his plutocratic feet. Had it been a shell, fizzing and ready to explode, it could not have dismayed Basset Rutherford more. All the paper bore was—

CHRISTOPHER BELLAMY.

The banker was thunderstruck. He shuddered in every limb, large beads of perspiration started out upon his forehead. It had come then, the crisis which he had dreaded for years. The sins of his youth had risen up against the self-righteous Pharisee. His punishment was great. He dared not refuse to see this forger. Head of a leading firm in Blackwater, a great name in the religious world, he must receive the very scum and dregs of rascaldom. With a great effort, he staggered to the window. It was on the ground floor, and gave into the Kidston shrubberies. With a mightier effort he controlled his voice and called huskily—

“Christopher Bellamy, come in.”

From among the Portugal laurels and aucubas, older and more jaded than Basset remembered him, Christopher emerged; and, with a wild laugh of bravado, sprang lightly into the study of the banker.

“Friend of my youth,” cried Christopher, with jovial effrontery, “I am glad to see you.”

“I cannot return the compliment,” said

the banker, grimly ; " twenty years have made me an altered man."

" You mean a richer one," spoke Christopher, carrying it off. " Ay, ay, my friend, rumours of your fame have reached even my insignificance. Banker, spinner, railway-king, man of religion ; you have done well, and now you must help me."

" Must ?" quavered Rutherford, dubiously.

" I regret to repeat it, must !"

" This is too much !" exclaimed the banker, with a darkening of the face. " There's a five-pound note ; amend your ways on it. The weak boy, whom you tempted into evil, is now the resolute man of mark and character. Begone ! say what you please of me. I defy you. It is the word of a banker now against the word of a vagabond."

" Take care, Basset Rutherford !" said the other, looking him steadily in the face. " I knew my man when I came to you. This fellow, I thought, with his pockets warm, and a varnish of saintship, will swear an old friend to the gallows without

a shadow of compunction. Therefore, when I renew my acquaintance, I must bring my old letter of introduction."

So Christopher produced from his pocket-book the old forged cheque, drawn by Esdaile in favour of Basset Rutherford.

"That! and in your hands!" gasped the banker, trembling from head to foot.

"Ah," smiled Christopher, airily, tying up the book again, "it brings back quite a scent of the dear old days, when we were both—sinners. I still push on in those thorny paths. You have reached the meads of asphodel and the consummation of heroes. Dear me!"

"How much do you want?" asked Basset hoarsely, clutching at the back of his chair.

"Bless the man," interposed Christopher, with a saucy petulance; "you are up to the throat in cash, you dream of coin, you pray for money, you are saturated with gold. Can't you conceive a man wanting anything else? Well, I suppose you can't."

"Then you are not in need?" demanded the banker, with a deep respiration of relief.

"Look here," said Bellamy, boastfully drawing out a bundle of bank-notes.

"That quite solves the question," remarked the banker in an easier tone: "you require them money—then?"

"Neither," said Bellamy, smugly: "neither in two days from the police."

Nichols laid back in his chair and covered his face with his hands. Christopher watched him curiously as a study in mental anguish.

"Come," said Christopher with a gesture of impatience, when Nichols still remained plunged in meditation: "you are making a mystery, you are overhauling an old riddle."

"I have no mystery, it is a summer-house," declared the banker in a friendly way as he rose.

"Exhaustive search," remarked Bellamy, who rose too.

"You are not correct," he pursued Nichols in an equable tone: "I will not go to the bottom of the matter in this place."

"If it is a good Christopher with a

shrug of his shoulders, "till we can arrange something better."

A knock came here at the study door.

"Wait," shouted the banker, turning pale, to the new comer ; adding, in a hurried undertone, to Christopher, "here is the summer-house key. Jump out and follow yonder path. Take the second turn to the left, enter, and lock yourself in."

Bellamy lost no time in obeying his directions, and sprang out into the shrubbery. The walk indicated, and the turn directed, brought him to a mouldy and rustic habitation thatched with ling. The lock yielded with a grating sound, Christopher entered, relocked the door on the inside, and pocketed the key. This done, he dusted the wooden seat from immemorial spiders' webs, and assumed the most comfortable attitude, of which the structure of the bench admitted. He then pondered, whether it would be prudent to smoke, and decided reluctantly, it would not ; ultimately, he produced a battered pack of cards, which he always kept about him, and began to play patience.

He had been thus occupied a short time, when he heard some one approaching outside the summer-house. Gathering his cards together hastily, he crouched into the dimmest recess of the place. The steps came on, and, to his dismay, another key was inserted in the lock. He sprang forward, and pressed himself up against that portion of the wall, which the door, when thrown back, would cover. The door swung inwards upon him, and he heard a shrill female voice say—

“Get in there, you old reprobate, for the present.”

A form was thrust into the dimness near him, and the door closed. The new comer and Christopher stood face to face.

“Joseph Behrends !”

“Mr. Eyserbeck !”

“Well,” cried Christopher, masking his surprise with an effort, and turning it off in his airy fashion, “we can now play picquet, or, at least, beggar my neighbour.”

Let us return to the banker in his study.

Christopher leapt out, and Rutherford said, “Come in !”

Mrs. Rutherford's maid entered.

"Could her mistress see Mr. Rutherford in twenty minutes?"

"Certainly, at once, if necessary."

"Mrs. Rutherford must take a turn in the shrubberies first," threw in the waiting woman, with a mincing pronunciation.

Half an hour passed, not a pleasant one for the banker, but it passed all the same.

His wife entered, deeply agitated. This did not improve matters, as the banker could with difficulty maintain his own composure.

"Basset," began the lady, "do not deal hardly with me. I have a confession to make."

"Have you discovered anything?" demanded Rutherford, hoarsely, "in the shrubberies? Good God!" he added, mentally, "I forgot she had a companion key!"

"Then we both know it," she ejaculated, with a burst of tears, "and can you forgive me?"

"I should have preferred, certainly," pursued Basset, tremulously, "that you never had gone to the summer-house. This



fellow ought not to be spoken to by any decent woman."

"I know it, alas! too well," wept his wife, flinging herself at the banker's feet, "but, oh, forgive me, Basset, for the police are after him, and—and—he is my own uncle!"

"Harriet," cried the banker, sternly, "have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Pity, husband," she went on, clasping his knees; "he is indeed my near relation, incredible as you may deem it. He is an old, weak, disreputable man. He has been drawn into a robbery by a tall resolute fellow, whose very name he is not sure of. He has fled to me, and, O husband, help and forgive me!"

"Harriet," repeated the banker, "I also must crave forgiveness."

"Basset," wept Mrs. Rutherford, "I am harbouring a felon."

"Harriet," sighed the banker, "I am harbouring another!"



## CHAPTER XII.

### A WIFE TOO MANY.

**L**UCAS RAYMOND'S office. The squire, Lucas, and Philip in consultation on the afternoon succeeding the robbery.

"So," said the squire, with a blank face, "the only clear matter in this strange business is, that the rascal has circumvented us all nicely."

"We shall catch him yet," consoled Lucas, cheerily.

"I don't know that," observed Philip, in a less hopeful voice, "not only he, but his accomplice, seem to have vanished into the bowels of the earth. There is not a trace. We have two clever rogues to deal with."

"Clever," interposed the squire, furrowing his forehead, "I call it demoniacal. Clearing the house of servants was neat, but picking my Bramah was diabolical."

"They are lying close in some cottage," suggested Lucas, with a grunt of annoyance. "They know better, than to trust themselves upon a railroad just yet."

"Would any cottager shelter them?" demanded Esdaile dubiously, with a restless change of position.

"Decidedly, for a bribe," insisted the lawyer, with a quiet smile.

"You are certain, squire," asked Philip, in a weighty tone, "that he has found all he wanted in your deed-box?"

"Trust to him for that," remarked the squire, with a shudder; "the packet is gone—nothing else is touched."

"This was docketted," assumed the elder lawyer glancing up, "and, I presume, in plain characters."

"Yes, confound it," acknowledged the squire, with the air of a man grievously outwitted.

"These proofs of his early crimes," said

Philip, with dismal conviction, "are by this time—"

"Ashes," supplied the squire curtly, throwing back his head; "and worse calamities follow in the sequel. A lady of estimable character, who is, to her own unutterable misery, this scoundrel's legal wife, is now at the mercy of a dangerous reprobate."

At this juncture, to the intense surprise of the trio in council, Mrs. Armitage walked straight into the room, without knock or preface. So silently and so rapidly had she glided in, that the squire nearly slipped from his seat with astonishment, when he found her standing between Lucas and himself.

"Master," confessed Hannah, going straight up to Lucas, "I have been listening."

"That was reprehensible," said Lucas with severe composure.

"Good will come of it," rejoined Hannah in her dogged fatalistic way.

"Her eyes seem wild," whispered the squire, moving across to Philip.

"Hush, squire," muttered Philip, with a hold upon Esdaile's arm; "there is an earnest purpose in this woman, as I read her. She has surely something on her mind."

"She seems to me a candidate for Bedlam," said Esdaile with a shrug, and he resumed his seat.

"I want to ask a question," pursued Hannah, folding her hands, and gazing vacantly into space.

"Well!" from Lucas, watching her narrowly, "let us hear it, Hannah."

"Is it the man, who came here on the day I was taken ill?"

Lucas seemed puzzled, and did not reply.

"The very person," decided Philip promptly. "I understand her, uncle. Yes, Mrs. Armitage, that is the actual man."

"Who has broken into the squire's strong room," she continued, without raising her eyes from the ground.

"Ay," cried Philip with a short laugh, "and into my head also, Mrs. Armitage."

"Is he married then?" questioned Han-

nah sharply, and her breast gave just one slight heave at these words; "when was he married?"

"Just twenty-two years ago," responded the squire in a hollow voice, "he married secretly his cousin Julia Bellamy, and had to leave her at the church door. He wanted her money, but in this he was luckily baffled."

"A money match," ejaculated Hannah despondently. "Ah, surely; what else should he marry for? He treated her ill. I suppose. He is a cruel, bitter, stony-hearted man. I reckon, that this lady would gladly be freed from such a husband, now?"

"Yes, by Heaven," exclaimed the squire, stealing a half-alarmed glance at the grim figure of the housekeeper; "this lady would, I verily believe, exchange her fine house and riches for rags and a hovel: if she could without publicity cancel her relationship to this criminal. But the marriage, alas, can only be undone by death or—"

"Hannah Armitage."

All three looked up hurriedly. She had

spoken her own name so quietly, and with such an absence of emotion in her tone, that they, one and all, were half inclined to question the evidence of their ears.

"What?" exclaimed Lucas, after a pause, when they had interchanged startled glances, "did you speak, Hannah?"

"I will save this lady," murmured Hannah, pressing her hand wearily to her forehead; "I will rescue her, at the cost of unveiling my own shame and my own sorrow."

"You know this fellow, then?" demanded the squire, resting both his hands on the table, and leaning over towards the speaker. "This incarnate devil seems to pervade everything, as if he were the master-fiend himself."

"Be calm, squire," expostulated Philip, pulling down Esdaile by his coat tails; "let her go on."

Hannah stepped firmly to the office-table, one thin white hand she placed upon the green baize cloth, with her other she raised her apron, and wiped a few icy drops from her brow. Slowly and mechanically

she enunciated the following disclosure. There was no hope, no passion, no anger in the voice or in the face of the speaker, as she made it.

“One June, twenty-three years ago, I married this man at Penshingle, in Cornwall. He then called himself Captain Julius Bell. He deserted me, as he deserted this lady.”

Dead silence in the office on this announcement. The ticking of the great clock in the passage painfully audible. Lucas staring at Esdaile. The squire with blank looks regarding the younger lawyer. Suddenly, the habit of business instinctively asserted itself in the midst of Lucas' amazement.

“Have you the certificate, Hannah?”

“It was taken from me,” she explained vaguely, “afterwards—in a place to which he sent me. But the church books can show my marriage, and so can the clergyman if he lives; he was a brother of this Squire Rutherford's.”

Lucas drew out his watch at once, and consulted it.



"There are two hours," he said deliberately, "before the night mail. Time is gold in this matter. I believe you, Hannah. I will start to-night for Cornwall, and verify your statement beyond dispute. In case the rascal is not caught, this fact will greatly strengthen our hands in bringing him to terms at a distance."

"Go by all means," cried the squire, slapping him on the shoulder; "your energy puts us younger men to shame."

"I must come back round by London," continued Lucas, "where I know this clergyman, Rutherford, resides; his address you can get me, Philip, from his daughter, who is now at Kidston. Telegraph this to me at Penshingle."

"Stay," suggested Philip, catching the infection of his uncle's energy; "division of labour is everything. Hear my amendment of your plans. I walk off to Kidston now—in five minutes—there I get this clergyman's address. If I can come back in time, I start with you by the night mail. At Didcot we separate. You west to Cornwall, I east to London. I examine

the divine, while you search the register. A day or more is thus saved."

"Are you fit to go?" enquired the squire with real solicitude; "your plan is excellent, but is it prudent for you to undergo fatigue at present? Your wound is hardly healed yet. Do not go. The loss of one day will only respite Eyserbeck a few more hours from the tread-mill, where he is sure to arrive in the long run."

"Pooh," said Philip, "a man at my age makes light of a broken crown. Only mind this, uncle, if I should be late for the night mail, you are to go on without me; inasmuch, as the register is of more vital consequence than the clergyman; who, ten to one, won't remember the wedding."

"Then," exclaimed Lucas, rising up with haste in his looks, "I am off by the mail to Cornwall at all events; but, my dear boy, do be in time, and start with me if you can."



## CHAPTER XIII.

### DRIFT IN THE MILL-WHEEL.

**N**EXT morning the squire sat breakfasting at the Priory in anything but the best of spirits. Violet looked pale and anxious ; Mrs. Wilfred was severely majestic, and much ruffled by recent events.

"I wish," said the squire, soaking a piece of toast in his tea-cup, "I had not let both the Raymonds be absent at once. I hope to goodness, they will not catch this fellow, till either Lucas or his nephew is back again."

"Your uncle," observed Mrs. Wilfred disdainfully to her daughter, "seems quite lost without his brace of lawyer favourites."

"I wish," sighed Violet with a pretty flush, "that Mr. Philip had not travelled so soon after his injury."

Mrs. Wilfred snorted at this observation in high displeasure; and remarked, rather unfeelingly, that travelling, she hoped, might clear Mr. Philip's head of its nonsense; if movement did not cure his crown of its injury. This innuendo was quite lost upon the squire, but it renewed the colour rapidly enough in Violet's cheeks.

"By the way," remembered the squire, with some abruptness, "I forgot to say, that Philip Raymond asked me to give you his kind regards, just before he started."

Violet became still more confused at this, and searched the bottom of her tea-cup assiduously for some seconds.

"I can't say much for either," ejaculated Mrs. Wilfred, in rather a fragmentary manner; "but I declare, that I like Wing best."

"Ladies generally do," said the squire, absently, moving his spoon about, "or the breast."

"Fiddle, squire, you are not attending," sneered the widow, biting her lips with vexation.

Violet could not control a smile.

"Who pays for these two lawyers scouring about the country?" demanded Mrs. Wilfred, viciously, after a pause.

"I shall, my dear," rejoined the squire, meekly, "unless Miss Bellamy insists upon doing so."

"Miss Bellamy!" exclaimed the widow, with a horror-stricken look.

"Hem, my dear," said the squire, slightly dismayed at the slip, "I forgot, that I had not troubled you with the particulars of this business. Yes—hem—Miss Bellamy of Bayswater is connected with it, I regret, for that lady's sake, to inform you."

"So I was perfectly aware," retorted Mrs. Wilfred, with freezing politeness; "indeed, I have expected Miss Bellamy in person to arrive every day."

"It is quite possible," pondered the squire, simply, as if a new light had struck him, "now you mention it, that she may

come ; indeed, in some respects, just now, it would facilitate matters, if she did so."

"That," added the widow, with an icy inclination of the head, "I can fully believe. Only, for myself and daughter, allow me to say, that the moment she enters this house, we remove to the inn."

"Hulloa!" cried the squire, wholly unprepared for this outbreak ; "don't be ridiculous, Clementina!"

"No," pursued Mrs. Wilfred, rising from the breakfast-table in full majesty : for she perceived, that the hour to denounce the squire had come ; and she determined not to mince matters, or to temporize any longer. "No, I have borne this long enough. What with governesses in blue serge, old flirts in Bayswater, bathing lawyers' heads, policemen, and housebreakers, I will bear this no longer, Mr. Esdaile. I will retire to Cheltenham. There, upon my slender means, I will live at least respectably. Violet will suffer, poor girl. That can't be helped—"

"Don't be a fool, Clementina," interposed the squire, rather cowed by her vehemence.

"Is this, I demand," echoed Mrs. Wilfred, pointing melodramatically through the window, "a fit residence for a girl of Violet's tender age; when here they come trooping up again, policemen first and then a string of tag-rag and bobtail after them? Such, Mr. Esdaile, are your continual associates."

"I am afraid," said the squire, gazing ruefully through the casement, "that this means they must have caught Eyserbeck. I do wish, that the Raymonds were back!"

"I wish Mr. Philip were here," coincided Violet, leaning beside the squire on the window ledge, and placing her hand fondly in her uncle's, while she whispered softly to him, "never mind mamma."

Up streamed the procession. Culf and Bradbeer first. A dozen labourers next. A miller in a dusty white coat prominent among these. Last, at least twenty village urchins.

"But I don't see any prisoner," commented the squire, becoming suddenly pale, "and why have they brought a miller with them? I fear something must be wrong. I will step out and meet them."

Out rushed the squire, seizing his hat in the hall as he passed; thence, he advanced towards the crowd with rapid steps.

"Hulloa, Bradbeer!" shouted the squire, when within twenty yards of the procession, "have you caught the rascals?"

"No, squire," answered Bradbeer, with his usually rubicund visage nearly colourless, "but this Eyserbeck has been at darker work still."

A shudder came over the squire, and his eyes grew dim.

"Quick, man, tell me," he entreated, faintly, with a wave of the arm.

"Eyserbeck has done a murder this time," said Bradbeer, gravely, and here he abruptly paused.

"And the Kidston miller found the body," added Culf, with an indicative tug at the miller's sleeve.



"Kidston?" shouted the squire, staggering; "why Philip Raymond went to Kidston last evening."

"But he didn't come back again," said Culf, sadly, with some approach to rugged sentiment.

"Don't tell me, he is murdered!" from the squire, with a wild cry.

"He is so, whether I tell you or not, squire," repeated Bradbeer, digging his heel into the gravel, with an oath.

"The body lies at the 'Headless Woman,' and we have called an inquest for to-morrow," subjoined Culf, who seemed to derive much consolation from the statement of this mark of prompt attention to the deceased gentleman.

But the squire pressed his hands to his face, but would neither move nor answer.

At this moment Violet came running towards them across the grass. Culf nudged the squire's elbow.

"Miss Violet's coming, squire," whispered the policeman, "it's hardly fit for such as her to hear about it."

"No, no, Culf," agreed the squire, rousing himself with an effort, and staring round wildly. "You are right, Culf; take back these fellows at once. I will join you at the inn presently. I must get Miss Violet indoors first somehow."

The crowd returned. The squire remained standing alone. Violet approached her uncle.

"What has happened, uncle?" she demanded, breathlessly, pausing to lean against a sun-dial, which stood in the shrubbery.

"Something very dreadful, my dear girl," he stammered. "Come back and don't ask me; I have not the heart to tell you."

"I know, it is something wrong with Philip Raymond!" she cried, in an extremity of terror.

"Don't ask me," repeated the squire, turning away.

"Philip is dead," she said slowly, in a kind of wondering way; "I see it in your face, uncle."

"Worse, my child—he is murdered."

Mrs. Wilfred, still at her post by the

window, heard Violet scream, and saw her fall into her uncle's arms ; upon which, that astute lady began to suspect, that something might really be the matter.





## CHAPTER XV.

INQUISITION FOR BLOOD.

*Extract from the Cropshire Advertizer of  
June 30th, 1862.*

*SPECIAL EDITION.*

ALLEGED MURDER AT KIDSTON.

*The Inquest and Verdict.*

“**Y**ESTERDAY afternoon, Mr. Fellow Deesy, the coroner for the eastern division of Cropshire, and a jury of householders, of whom Mr. Eavestaff, grocer, was chosen foreman, held an inquisition at the ‘Headless Woman’ inn, Garwood, touching the death of Philip Raymond of that town, nephew to the well-known attorney of this name; who met with his

death under the following suspicious circumstances.

“ The jury, having been sworn, proceeded to view the body, and on their return,

“ A juror asked, whether any person accused of this murder was yet in custody.

“ The coroner replied in the negative, and believed the juror’s question premature, and to some extent informal.

“ A juror, while bowing to the coroner’s reproof, yet felt sure, that his question was one, which had occurred to the minds of many of his yoke-fellows ; and that it was such a query, as they would gladly have heard answered in the affirmative.

“ Inspector Bradbeer explained, that he had arrested the conjurer, Signor Fresco, on his own responsibility.

“ The following evidence was then adduced ; the witnesses being marshalled in their order by Inspector Bradbeer, the highly intelligent and zealous officer at the head of the Garwood police ; to whom great credit is due for the admirable arrangements throughout this painful enquiry ; and for the

comfortable accommodation accorded to the gentlemen of the press present.

“William Cup was the first witness called. He said he was a miller, and resided at Kidston Mill. About six o'clock on Friday morning he had gone down to the lower mill-pool. He had there discovered the body of deceased. It had been floated or washed to the side of the pool. It lay in about six inches only of water, when he first came upon it. There were several contusions on the head and face. Witness was about to particularize these injuries, when the coroner remarked, that Dr. Lapworth's evidence would sufficiently describe the wounds on the person of deceased. Witness continued, that except a shirt, the body was naked. He had shouted for assistance to another miller named Brat, and they had together carried the body into the mill.

“By the foreman—He could only suggest, that the body had been stripped in order to hinder identification.

“By the coroner—He knew the deceased well by sight, and had identified the body

at once. Had seen deceased on market-days in Garwood.

“James Brat, miller, Kidston, merely corroborated the former witness.

“Enoch Culf, policeman, Garwood, deposed, that in consequence of information received from Cup, he had proceeded to Kidston mill yesterday morning ; and had there found the body in one of the lower rooms in the condition already described ; he had then returned to Garwood and fetched Dr. Lapworth.

“By a juror—He was only second policeman at Garwood. He had informed Inspector Bradbeer of Cup’s communication. Bradbeer was in bed at that time at his house. The inspector seemed disinclined to get up, so he, Culf, had gone without him.

“The coroner having commented severely on the inspector’s conduct,—

“Edgar Lapworth was called, and gave his evidence under the influence of deep emotion. He said, he was a member of the College of Surgeons and Licenciate of the Apothecaries’ Company. He had known deceased very intimately. Went

with Culf yesterday morning to Kidston ; had there seen the body of his friend, only partially covered with a shirt. The wounds, by which death had been caused, were on the head. Had discovered no marks of violence on the rest of the person. He had found a deep lacerated wound, measuring an inch and a half, stretching from the outer end of the left eyebrow in an upward direction over the ear. There were several minor contusions on the back of the head. For one of these he had attended deceased a few days before his death, but he could not say which. The cranium had also been fractured, and there was extravasation of blood on the right posterior lobe of the brain, produced by a wound on the temple. Believed, this last injury was the immediate cause of death. A blunt instrument, probably of wood, caused these injuries. Believed the body to have been stripped and thrown into the mill-pool, soon after the murder was committed. Was certain, a mere accidental fall into the water could not have caused the injuries.

“ By a juror—A blow from one of the



mill-wheels might possibly cause each and all of the injuries ; but he did not believe, such to have been the case. He ought to say, that death had greatly altered his late friend's appearance.

“ By the coroner—He had on the whole no doubt of deceased's identity.

“ Harvey Esdaile, Esq., of Garwood Priory, who had been accommodated with a seat by the coroner, said he was a magistrate for the county and a deputy lieutenant ; that the Priory strong room had been burglariously entered by night, three days back ; and a packet abstracted thence, implicating one Christopher Bellamy, alias Dionysius Eyserbeck, alias Julius Bell, in tampering with a cheque, many years ago ; the packet could be of no use to any one but Bellamy. Witness had received a warning that Bellamy would attempt to possess himself of these papers. On the night of the burglary, witness had been decoyed to London by a forged telegraph, containing information only known to himself, Bellamy, and one other party. He had since ascertained, that the other party had not de-

spatched the message, therefore Bellamy must have done so. No questions were asked Mr. Esdaile.

“ William Tibbets, page, Garwood Priory, deposed—That he had followed deceased up from Signor Fresco’s entertainment on the night of the burglary. He had seen lights in the library windows, but deceased had put them down to moon-beams. Deceased had entered by the kitchen door a few moments before witness ; when witness followed, he found deceased lying stunned in the passage. He had assisted to bathe the contusion. When deceased revived, he said, that he had been struck with a stick at the back of the head, and deceased believed, Eyserbeck had done it. Had seen the three contusions on the head of deceased, thought them all like the previous contusion, but could not pick it out of the three.

“ By a juror—He had seen no one escape. He had lagged behind, fearing that something was wrong at the house. All the other servants had gone to the conjurer’s.

“ The coroner commented severely on the conduct of the Priory servants.

“ William Tibbets, recalled—Believed, that deceased’s sudden return had greatly disconcerted the burglars, and supposed, Eyserbeck would bear deceased a grudge on that account.

“ By the foreman—Could not say whether the lights were moon-beams.

“ Mr. Esdaile here interposed, and said, that deceased had greatly assisted in all the measures recently taken to thwart Eyserbeck. Except himself, he felt confident, there was no one, whom Eyserbeck hated worse ; if Eyserbeck knew all their recent plans, as he probably did.

“ John Woodmason, publican, Waverton, said, that two men arrived at the inn by the mail train on the afternoon previous to the robbery. They had left his house at dusk in a gig. He had been shown a photograph of Bellamy, which he identified as the taller of the two men. The men went away and did not return. They had not paid their bill.

“ Miles Doorcast, farmer, Garwood, had

found Woodmason's horse and gig, tethered in a field adjoining Garwood Park, a short time after the robbery had been committed. Had seen Culf find a file in the bottom of the gig (file produced); that was the same file.

"Mr. Esdaile recalled, said, that Philip Raymond had walked alone to Kidston on business relative to Bellamy's discovery. His object was to procure from Miss Caroline Rutherford her father's address. It had been painful for that lady to attend, but, he might tell them, that Philip Raymond had arrived at Kidston, and went thence, well and in good spirits, intending to catch the mail train to London that night. Mr. Lucas Raymond had gone by that train to a distant part of England. He had been telegraphed for.

"Emma Klein, governess, Kidston Manor, deposed, that she knew Bellamy alias Eyserbeck, well by sight; she had seen him, on the morning the body was found, in the Kidston shrubberies; he had avoided her and taken to his heels.

"The coroner in summing up, addressed

the jury, and said, that this was all the evidence for the present before them ; but he was willing, if they wished, to adjourn the enquiry until to-morrow. He regretted, that Mr. Lucas Raymond, uncle of the deceased, had not been present ; as his sound legal sense, no less than his intimate knowledge of the deceased, would have been invaluable in the present enquiry. Mrs. George Raymond, the mother, was also unable to face the agitation of being there to-day ; but that lady had no evidence of any importance to tender. He was authorized by Mr. Esdaile to state, that Mrs. Hannah Armitage was able to give important evidence bearing on the past life of Bellamy ; but, as this enquiry was chiefly to ascertain, how Philip Raymond, the deceased, had met his death ; he did not think it necessary to call her before them. Indeed, soon after her master's departure, Mrs. Armitage had become so seriously unwell, that, if necessary, Dr. Lapworth could certify, that she was at present quite unfit to appear.

“He would only mention to discard it, the evidence of a cottage girl near Kidston ;

which was so wholly frivolous, that the police did not feel it worth while to call her before the jury to-day. The child maintained, that she had met a man, late Thursday night, with nothing on but his shirt ; singing aloud to himself on the highway road, and carrying a bunch of flowers. He need only mention this, before twelve men of their sound sense, to dismiss it as incredible. No doubt the child was imaginative, and much shocked by recent events. Even adults have been known to give very strange evidence under the influence of any strong excitement.

“ The coroner then recapitulated the evidence above given, and concluded by stating; that it seemed clear, from the medical testimony, that the injuries, which caused death in this case, could neither be self-inflicted or accidentally caused. Therefore, the inference was inevitable, that such wounds must have been given by some other person. It remained for them to say, from the evidence before them, who this person was ; or they could give an open verdict. The various threads seemed to converge

curiously enough towards one individual. The fact of the body having been stripped was extremely singular, and he could suggest no adequate explanation for that circumstance. Possibly, the murderer believed, that his victim's remains might not be washed ashore, till the features were too decomposed for recognition; while he feared that the textile fabric of the dead man's apparel might continue to supply a clue long after any physical identification had ceased to be possible. In this state, of course, a stripped body could neither be claimed nor sworn to. He merely threw this out as an explanatory suggestion, with no great confidence in its sufficiency.

"One more notable point seemed to be this, that the deceased was greatly changed, even during the short time that had elapsed since death. On this account, they had been unwilling to postpone the inquest a single hour, as the question of identity might have arisen. The immortal Shakspeare had well said, 'that death was a great disguiser.' For himself, strange to say, this difficulty did not exist in the pre-

sent instance. He had not had the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with deceased, though he had been on intimate terms with several of his uncles, and he must say, that anybody would have known deceased for a member of the Raymond family. He had, he believed, now touched upon the leading points, and it was for them to consider their verdict.

“The foreman (Mr. Eavestaff, Garwood) said, that, before retiring to deliberate upon this case ; in which, as landlord to the body, he felt a painful interest beyond and besides his official position as foreman ; he wished to ask the coroner a question. One of their number, a miller by profession, being firmly persuaded, that deceased had been bruised by the wheel of a water-mill, wished clearly to ascertain, whether, if another person had pushed deceased into the beat of the paddles of the water-mill wheel, that would constitute murder, or must his colleagues consider it as accidental death ?

“The coroner thanked Mr. Eavestaff for asking the question, as it enabled him to make a point, which he, the coroner, had



overlooked. The body being nearly naked, no pushing in could have occurred, such as the miller's query contemplated; but a pushing of this nature, had it taken place, would be undoubtedly murder, or manslaughter: according to the circumstances, under which the push was administered.

"The jury retired for half an hour; and, on their return, gave a verdict of wilful murder against Christopher Bellamy, alias Dionysius Eyserbeck, alias Julius Bell. We may state, in conclusion, that Eyserbeck is not yet in custody, but the police are making every search upon his track.

"There is much excitement in this usually quiet rural centre."





## CHAPTER XV.

### SADDLE MY HORSES.

**I**N the morning after the inquest, Basset Rutherford, haggard and careworn, approached the summer-house in his shrubberies. He held a printed hand-bill, on which he gazed from time to time with looks of disquietude. He proceeded to give three taps on the panel of the door.

"Wake up, you old dormouse," cried a voice within, evidently Christopher's. "Breakfast and your respected nephew demand admission."

The door was then cautiously opened. Christopher stood in the entrance, with a sinister smile. Behrends still lay on the seat, in a somnolent attitude.

"I miss our morning meal," said Christopher, with affected buoyancy, "our waiter comes empty-handed. It is something to be waited on by a banker, though the tea is late."

Behrends here sat up, and rubbed his sleepy eyes, murmuring—

"I dreamt, that I was in Barrett's Court, and I wake in my niece's summer-house, where——"

"The ventilation is far from good," laughed his incorrigible companion, "and the spiders run as large as black currants."

"You will not," spoke the banker, with a sigh, "need much breakfast after perusing this."

"'One hundred pounds reward,'" read Christopher, carelessly, "'for the apprehension of Christopher Bellamy, lately known in Garwood as Dionysius Eyserbeck.' Very handsome this, I am sure, of Mr. Esdaile. You see, I am worth as much as a good carriage horse. Hulloo! 'Found yesterday guilty at the inquest of the wilful murder of Philip Raymond, Lawyer, of Garwood.'"

Here Behrends began to cry ; and Christopher in spite of himself gave a great start, and his lip trembled.

“ I told you,” blubbered the locksmith, piteously, “ that you had done for him.”

“ Silence, driveller,” rebuked his accomplice, with a savage push of his boot. “ Your nephew, with our full confidence in his discretion, need not know all our little secrets.”

“ The cup of my degradation is full,” groaned the banker, with his hand upon his eyes. “ I am forced to hear the confessions of your crimes ; and I can move no finger to deliver up such caitiffs to justice !”

“ I won’t believe it !” blustered Christopher, with a vehement stamp of his foot ; “ this Raymond must have been as soft as sugar, for that tap to have finished him. There is some mistake here. Have you no further particulars ?”

“ Christopher Bellamy,” said the banker, sternly, “ these ghastly details do not concern me. I have harboured a thief to my infinite abasement and shame, but a mur-

derer I will never shelter. Denounce me, if you please, and begone. You will find a horse at your service in my stables. All the grooms are now at breakfast. This much will I stretch to save you; escape while you can! The governess here has recognized you already in these shrubberies."

"The neat little damsel in blue," sneered Bellamy, shrugging his shoulders. "Alas, that the force of circumstances should have then obliged me, to be rude enough not to return her recognition. I saw her, the little darling!"

While Christopher vapoured out this piece of bravado, he had been really deliberating, in what spirit to receive the banker's ultimatum. Should he gallop away? Should he defy Rutherford and remain?

"Come," interposed the banker, nervously, "you must be mad to loiter. The horse is saddled and ready; mount him, for Heaven's sake, and escape."

"So be it," agreed Bellamy, at length, with a wry face. "You are behaving like a sneak, old money-bags; but the governess

won't keep my secret so well, as my sanctimonious fellow-forgery, or his amiable lady, the pick-lock's niece ; so I accept my evil star and decamp, after bestowing my hearty malediction on the brace of you !"

"In an evil hour did I ever see you, Christopher Bellamy!" said the banker, with a shudder, bowing his head.

"If I am taken," resumed Christopher, in a jaunty disdain, "I fear, the little incident of the Oxford Street tavern will gain an unenviable notoriety. Meantime, Joe, farewell. Catch this hand-bill. See, you can earn fifty pounds more by turning king's evidence ; unless you also gave this young lawyer a sly kick after he was down ; in which case Mrs. Rutherford's uncle will swing with my ignoble self."

Christopher then disappeared on his toes, with long strides in the direction of the Kidston stables. The banker drew a deep sigh of relief. Behrends remained snivelling in the summer-house before him.

"You won't turn me out, for Harriet's sake," Joseph entreated, mopping his eyes

penitently, and then clasping his horny hands.

"N-no," said the banker, reluctantly ; "you may stay where you are. I have brought you some tracts. There are plenty more, when those are finished."

"I think," said Joseph, humbly, and with a certain weariness, "I could understand them better after—a little breakfast."

"Harriet shall bring some. There, lock yourself in."

The door closed, and the banker walked slowly back to the house.

"I feel," he murmured to himself, "that I cannot hold out against this strain much longer. If things do not mend, I must knock up. Think of my early sins rising against me now. At this time of all others ; when I require a cool and calm brain for those gigantic commercial enterprises, of which at present my name and energy are the key-stone. If I was suddenly—withdrawn from them just now, the collapse would be awful. I am not satisfied with my health ; that strange numbness

in my right hand, those odd sensations in my head. Harriet shall telegraph to one of my partners at Blackwater to come over at once. If I am going to be ill, our firm must sell out of several schemes, before any rumour of my malady leaks out. I hope, I shall be better after breakfast ; this may be only a passing weakness after all."

And the merchant, not very steadily, passed back into the house.

Let us now transfer our narrative to Garwood Station. Three passengers were seated in the waiting-room, where Emma met Mrs. Raymond weeks ago. They had just arrived from town by the mail train, and were waiting for the Priory carriage ; which, like everything else in Garwood, was always behind its time.

"It will be interesting," said one gentleman, pulling up his shirt collar, "to observe the effect of a great crime upon the faces and doings of a village community."

"Indeed, Mr. Padfield," replied the lady, with a shiver, "I can hardly look



any one here in the face, so my personal observations will be limited."

"It is about the time," observed the third passenger, in a dreamy voice, "that the joint comes up at the Pneumatic Club. I wonder, who has got my usual table?"

"Stimpson," cried Padfield, in some disdain, "you are nearly face to face with a great tragedy; does not even that elevate your soul above club cutlets? These crimes are the realities of life, these mere dinings and empty tattle are the shadows."

"I prefer the shadows," whined Stimpson, humbly; "I have nothing like the digestion required for the tragedies. There is a want of punctuality to begin with—"

"About the Priory carriage," interposed Julia Bellamy, who did not relish the turn, which the discussion had taken between her two trustees.

"Here comes Lapworth, at any rate," exclaimed Padfield, in a tone of relief, "with his looks full of news. Well, dear boy, how goes it with yourself and your medical prospects?"

"This seems a fated village," replied Lapworth, gravely, grasping his guardian's hand; "nothing but disaster on disaster, and, as for illness, my hands are more than full."

"First, is Eyserbeck taken yet?" demanded Julia, in breathless interest.

"No, Miss Bellamy, he is not," answered the doctor, moodily, "but two London officers came down this morning, who are working the search out systematically at last. Our local inspector is in high dudgeon at their advent. Miss Klein has given us the best clue; it is supposed, that Eyserbeck is in hidlands, (as the peasants call it), somewhere near Kidston——"

"That is extremely probable," mused Miss Bellamy, casting her eyes down, and nodding gloomily.

"Then," pursued Lapworth, dropping his voice, "to crown it all, Mr. Rutherford has just had a paralytical seizure."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Julia, pressing her palms together.

"Want of regular hours," decided Stimpson, in an oracular voice.

"Indeed," narrated Lapworth, wiping his forehead, "I am only just back. He was seized soon after breakfast this morning. I trotted over about noon, but finding a Blackwater doctor already installed, I returned here, where I am more needed. You await Mr. Esdaile, of course. I want most urgently to see him."

"You met Emma at Kidston?" questioned Julia, looking up again.

"For a moment," added Lapworth, hurriedly. "I told her you were expected, and she sent her love. The poor girl is in the lowest of spirits."

"About the murder?" hazarded Julia with an effort and a sigh.

"Not wholly," said the doctor with a distressed look, "Poor Philip was my best friend, she hardly knew him. N—no,—I think, I had better tell you, that you may know the kind of comfort she requires; and, I trust you will see her at once, for she sorely needs a friend just now. It is frankly this; a young squire named Bramley, handsome, rich, and—worthless, has, they say, been paying her some attentions

since her arrival ; now Mr. Bramley has abruptly transferred his addresses to Miss Caroline Rutherford, the niece of poor Mr. Rutherford ; and, (here the doctor faltered) I believe Miss Rutherford and Mr. Bramley are engaged."

Lapworth nearly broke down during the concluding sentences ; Julia saw, there was something wrong personally with the doctor ; but she deemed it best to ignore his agitation, and merely rejoined—

" Poor Emma !"

" The carriage from Garwood at last," indicated Padfield, uncrossing his legs and stretching his arms out.

" This brings us one stage nearer dinner," softly meditated Stimpson, dusting his sleeve, " though heaven knows, if the beef of these rural districts may not emulate the hide of the rhinoceros ; and their mutton may not combine the toughness of gutta-percha with the stringiness of whipcord !"

Enter the squire and Mrs. Wilfred Esdaile.

" Julia," he exclaimed much moved,

holding out both his hands, "after so many years of separation, welcome ! Under sad circumstances you come, but welcome still. Your trustees, I presume. Your hands, gentlemen. Julia, my sister-in-law, Mrs. Wilfred Esdaile."

Harvey and Julia stood for a few seconds with their palms clasped, perusing each other in a sad half-bewildered way. Then the two ladies greeted very affectionately. For Mrs. Wilfred had decided, indeed, after fierce debate with herself, that amiability was the best policy, after all. She had found, that she could not prevent Julia from coming to the Priory. On this point, Esdaile, most manageable of men, had taken the bit of obstinacy between his teeth. Consequently, if she left the Priory, Julia would surely arrive and marry Esdaile out of hand ; for Mrs. Wilfred was in the dark as regarded the Bellamy marriage. But, argued Mrs. Wilfred, she might, if she stayed and endured Julia's presence, be able to put a judicious spoke or two in the connubial wheel of the squire's old sweetheart. So she ended by coming into

the waiting room, all beaming with cordiality.

"I have wished so long to see you, dear Miss Bellamy," simpered the widow, rustling all over with silk, and smiling at a great rate.

This was in a measure true. The boy, who longs to throw a missile at a stray cat, certainly wishes for that animal's appearance.

"Mr. Esdaile has been my truest friend," replied Julia in perfect good faith, "and his sister seems my friend naturally."

"I regret my daughter Violet is not here," went on Mrs. Wilfred with many undulating movements of well-bred greeting; "but this melancholy occurrence has quite upset the poor child. I tell her, that she ought to bear up as I do. Providence sends us murders, as autumn sends us damsons; and, I am sure, if it were not for the damsons, half the cottagers round here would never pay their rents; therefore—you quite see what I mean, dear Miss Bellamy, do you not?"

"A word, squire," said the doctor, draw-

ing Esdaile aside, as soon as he decently could interpose during these greetings ; " I want you to come to Mrs. Armitage at once. The woman is dreadfully ill, and may die or go mad nearly every moment. She can evidently make most important depositions about Eyserbeck. You can take these down, as a magistrate, at her bedside. I really do not like to wait till Lucas Raymond's return. Take my advice and come now."

"Well, well," said the squire with an anxious face, "so be it. Julia, may I trouble you for one moment?"

He led her out to the station platform. Mrs. Wilfred followed them with greedy eyes, but Mr. Padfield was just then giving her a lively analysis of the death-rate in our principal towns, so the widow could not decently interrupt him.

"Julia," said the squire, when they were outside, "I wrote to you briefly about this poor woman, who says that Christopher Bellamy married her. Lapworth tells me that she is in a critical state, and I am going as a magistrate to take her evidence.

Now this concerns yourself more than anyone; will you come, or will you stay away?"

"I will come," replied Julia, without a shade of hesitation.

"I believe you are right," nodded the squire approvingly; "then we had better send home your trustees with Mrs. Wilfred."

Julia signified assent, and, after some difficulty, the widow, Padfield, and Stimpson were safely deposited in the Priory carriage, and, being driven rapidly away, were disposed of for the present. Stimpson went readily enough, for he was inwardly fretting under the dusty disorder, which the journey had wrought in his usually reproachless outer man. But the widow did not at all relish being sent home; and Padfield knew, that the effect of the murder on this village community ought to be studied at once, so he went reluctantly also to the seclusion of the Priory.





## CHAPTER XVI.

### DISCLOSURES.

**M**ANNAH ARMITAGE lay in bed in one of the large gaunt bedrooms of the vicarage. Mrs. Samler, the laundress, bent over her, arranging the pillows. There was a strange excited dilation of the invalid's eyeballs, and she was restless with her hands.

Lapworth, Esdaile, and Julia entered noiselessly, and the doctor motioned to the nurse to withdraw.

"Mrs. Armitage," spoke Lapworth, in as cheerful a voice, as he was able to command, "I have judged it best for the squire to come now, and receive from your own lips

on oath the history of your marriage with Julius Bell."

"Who is the strange lady?" asked Hannah feebly.

"I am your sister in misfortune," replied Julia, taking Hannah's hand. "I am this Julius Bell's second wife. Your confession will deliver me from a living death. Here we are, hand in hand, the two women whose lives this one man has blighted. We have met at last. Speak, my sister!"

"When will master return?" demanded Hannah anxiously.

"He may come any moment now," rejoined the squire, pulling out his watch.

"Shall I not wait till Mr. Lucas comes?"

"I think not," said the doctor firmly, yet with great gentleness.

"You think, then, that I shall not recover," interposed Hannah, with a quick glance.

"I am convinced," urged Lapworth with some diplomacy, "that it will ease you greatly to get this disclosure off your mind."

"Let me be sworn, then," assented

Hannah, extending her wan thin fingers for the book.

The squire having administered the oath, she asked to be propped up by another pillow, and Lapworth gave her a restorative. Then in a low, but distinct voice, she began,

"I was born at Penshingle in Cornwall—"

Here she was interrupted by the sound of several voices in the passage.

"One moment," said Lapworth, "I must ascertain what this means."

And he left the room to re-enter shortly with tidings of moment.

"Bellamy is taken," he exclaimed, joyously, "they have got him below in Lucas Raymond's office."

"Have you strength to confront him, Mrs. Armitage?" inquired the squire, eyeing the sick woman rather dubiously.

"I am always strong enough to vindicate my good name," returned Hannah, with a sudden quick flash of the eyes; "let him be brought up. It is his turn to fear now, not mine."

"Julia," whispered the squire, anxiously, "will you pass out before he is brought in?"

"I am no weak girl," protested Julia, with a quivering lip. "Hannah has spoken well, and, as with her, so it is my duty to stay."

"Bring in the wretch," said the squire, with reluctant assent; and Lapworth went out again.

Then Christopher Bellamy was thrust in handcuffed, attended by Culf, and the two policemen imported from London. Christopher's clothes were soiled and mud-stained; his head was bandaged, and he halted as he walked. Still, some of his old jaunty effrontery managed to survive the truly dispiriting situation in which he found himself.

"How was this capture made?" asked Esdaile, after a glance of disgust at the prisoner.

"He stole one of the Kidston horses this morning," narrated Culf, coming a little to the front, "and rode away on him like blue lightning."

"The horse was given me, Mr. Constable," corrected Christopher, with an attempt at urbanity.

"We know all about that," said Culf, derisively.

"I believe he speaks truthfully," added Julia, to the surprise of every one.

"Thanks, Julia," nodded the prisoner, saucily; "I would kiss my hand to you, but unfortunately these gentlemen have rather hampered my manual movements."

"Like blue lightning he rides away," Culf resumed, after clearing his throat, "till midway to Blackwater over goes horse and man upon a heap of macadamite stones. The horse was lame as a tree, when they picked themselves up; and the man's head was cut and his knee likewise. He 'crep' into a cottage to bathe himself; where a boy, who used to be at school here, knew him. So the cottagers round turned out with flails and pitch-forks, and took him like a mad dog."

"Quite correct, Culf," said Christopher, condescendingly; "and now I suppose we may step downstairs again. Having been

made a show of to a lady in bed and an amiable justice ; which, I suppose, are Cropshire manners ; I presume, we may now adjourn to the lockups."

"Don't you remember Hannah Armitage?" called the sick woman, as she rose up in her bed ; "come and search this faded face, feature by feature ; and see if that does not refresh your memory."

Those, who stood nearest Christopher, observed a slight and almost instantaneous tremor pass across his countenance. This lasted only a moment ; then his eye hardened at once, and his mouth became firm and cruel. Deliberately, he replied without once moving his eyes from hers.

"Certainly, I know you are this old lawyer's housekeeper, whom Garwood gossip reports as rather—hem—eccentric. I have often heard of you, but I never saw you before. I regret our acquaintance begins under such untoward circumstances."

Hannah uttered a low moan. Even the squire and Lapworth were half convinced by his cool effrontery. Julia once more interposed, and her second remark was as

startling as her first. She merely said quietly,

"From long experience of this man's manner, I am convinced that he is now lying."

This was a clincher for Christopher, though slightly informal, as a legal statement. The sick woman looked up at her with gratitude in her swimming eyes.

"Julia," observed Christopher with a tigerish smile, "this time I do not kiss my hand to you."

"Resume your story, Hannah," advised Julia, bending kindly over the invalid and patting her wasted hand; "recount it all to him again, chapter and verse, that will bring him to his senses."

"Time seems a drug in Cropshire," drawled Christopher, shrugging his shoulders with an affectation of weariness, "we are in for some delirious rigmarole now."

Lapworth moistened Hannah's lips with a little wine, and amid a breathless attention she resumed,

"I was born at Penshingle, in Cornwall. My father was the draper in that town. My mother spoilt me and I grew up pretty

and headstrong. When I was eighteen a stranger arrived. He called himself Julius Bell. He was tall, good-looking and about two years older than myself. A mere boy in years, but a man in wickedness. He met me on the beach and then began to court me. I was vain and inexperienced, and he soon got a power over me. My parents forbade me to meet him, as he had already established an evil reputation in the town. He persuaded me that he was vilely slandered. This ended in our walking off one morning to church, and getting quietly married. The register will prove this. My father shut his doors upon me, and my mother took to her bed. My husband brought me away to Dawlish. Here we lived in a quiet way for six months. He had begun to ill-treat me already ; he told me, that he had tied a log round his neck, and utterly blasted his worldly prospects for a pretty face. Then came my first confinement. All is vague and misty about that time ; but I can remember nursing my baby, a beautiful boy. It seems, that I went out of my mind with that ill-



ness ; for, when I woke up sane, a year after my child's birth, the people told me ; that I was in a private asylum near Dawlish, and that my husband had placed me there. He had paid down the first quarter of my board in advance. The second quarter never arrived. The people there had written for it ; he had left a false address, and their own letter was returned.

“ He had said to the managers of the establishment, that he meant to place my child under the care of a relative of his own. I felt convinced that this was false, and knew that my infant had been consigned to one of those miserable baby-farms ; where he would probably never even send, as in my case, a second remittance for its benefit. So I recovered in a mad-house, to find myself without a trace of child or husband. This made me ill again, and I returned home to find myself motherless. My father also died within the year after my return. All these troubles made me strange and morbid. I hated Penshingle as the scene of my courtship. I was a gazing-stock to the boys, and a

trite warning to the giddy girls of the town. My father's small patrimony was left to me. I sold off everything, and hired a house in London. I thought to maintain myself by taking in lodgers. Lucas Raymond came as one of them. I hoped also to get news of my husband there. I loathed him already, but I grievously wanted my child. I need say no more, till my master's return. Look at me, Julius Bell, have I spoken truth or falsehood?"

Christopher turned from the sick woman to the other inmates of the room with an expression of the most provoking non-chalance.

"Her story," he said, "may be true or false, for all I know, or for all I care. Only, allow me to say, that I am not its hero. By her own confession she has been crazy several times. So my amiable wife, assisted by your worthy magistrate, the squire of the parish, sees in this poor demented soul, dexterously primed beforehand, a convenient instrument for annulling a marriage,

of which my affectionate spouse is weary. I must, though surrounded by henchmen of your squire, protest, as an Englishman, against the reckless informality of Cropshire justice ; I was arrested on a cock-and-bull charge of murder, and now I am stuck up to be accused of bigamy by a lunatic."

"Your hanging will keep," retorted Culf, solemnly, "but her deposition won't ; so don't you be so ready with your justice and informality."

"At last," exclaimed Esdaile, as a rapid step was heard ascending the stairs ; "here comes Lucas back from Cornwall."

Raymond entered wildly and hurriedly, and cast an amazed glance at the inmates of the chamber.

"Is the world turned upside down?" he ejaculated, wrenching off his overcoat. "What is come to Garwood? People avoid me in the street,—shake their heads as I pass them,—mutter to their neighbours. I rush home, Bedlam is let loose, and worse confounded here. Hannah in bed, a posse of policemen, Eyserbeck in

handcuffs. Every room in my house flung wide open, and——”

“You received my telegram,” interposed the squire, in great anxiety.

“No message ever reached me,” cried Lucas, vehemently, and he breathed short.

“He does not know,” nodded Esdaile to the rest, in a sad, disheartened voice. “Who will tell him?”

“Before another word is said,” interrupted the sick woman, almost fiercely, “I demand to speak with master. Let me whisper to you, Mr. Lucas.”

Raymond approached the bed, and Hannah murmured eagerly in his ear these words, inaudible to the rest of the room.

“I fell ill an hour after you and Mr. Philip were gone by train. I lost sense and power of movement. I left the key in the door, and he has escaped. Can you forgive me, master? I dared not speak, till you returned, to anyone about it. I did not know how much it might not injure you. Do as you please now, about telling or keeping this secret. I have counted

the minutes of your absence with this weary load upon me."

"I forgive you freely, Hannah," said Lucas, softly; "we are not masters of our health. I guessed he had escaped. Well, well, our secret is known; so be it."

"Shall you tell them, master?" from Hannah, still in an undertone.

"Of course: how should we get him back, else, Hannah?"

"That will never be, master. He lies stiff and murdered, at the inn."

"Good God; my nephew!"

"Your nephew, master."

"Who did it, Hannah?"

"He did," with a nod towards the handcuffed Eyserbeck.

Lucas reeled backwards at these tidings, and sank down into a chair beside the bed, where he hid his face between his hands. The whole dialogue between Lucas and his housekeeper had been conducted in whispers.

"He knows it now; she has told him," spoke the squire. Then touching Raymond's shoulder, he resumed in a voice of

sympathy, "Don't take on so much, Lucas. It is a dreadful business, but the poor boy is at rest now."

Then Lucas glared up again with a sudden flash of anger, which seemed to put aside his grief.

"How was this done?" he panted. "What possible motive could this fiend have found for the deed?"

There succeeded a short silence; the story was long, and no one knew exactly at which point to commence the narrative. Culf rushed in, while wiser heads than his own hesitated.

"This Eyserbeck," said Culf, bluntly, "murdered your nephew, somewhere in or near Kidston Park, and flung his body into Kidston mill-pool afterwards."

"Moonshine," cried the prisoner violently excited, "I tell you, I never touched young Raymond within three miles of Kidston, if I was to die for it this instant."

"Where did you touch him then?" asked the squire.

"The prisoner is not questioned on this

side the water," retorted Christopher, furiously.

"Then," suggested Culf sarcastically, "the body must have got up, stritched himself, and walked hissself into the middle of the mill-pond."

Here Lucas Raymond made a most surprising remark.

"This poor idiot lad never harmed a fly."

"Idiot?" ejaculated the squire, raising his hands.

"Idiot!" echoed Culf with a low whistle.

"Idiot," growled Christopher, sullenly, "he had the best head of the pack of you."

"Silence, every man," cried the doctor, "I begin to see daylight."

"My idiot nephew," persisted Lucas, "whom I have kept for many years above stairs in this house."

"Was he like Philip?" almost shrieked the doctor.

"Like as two peas; he escaped through Hannah's sudden indisposition."

"Squire," ejaculated the doctor, rushing at him, and nearly wringing his arms off,

“this is a hideous mistake, Philip is not murdered after all.”

There came another rush on the stairs, the door flew open, and Philip Raymond, sound and well, stood among them all !







## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE FOOL OF THE FAMILY.

**H**ALF an hour afterwards, when the violent emotions, consequent upon Philip's almost miraculous restoration to life, had subsided, Lucas Raymond managed in a husky voice to explain,

"Squire and friends," he said, "I have done wrong in keeping the existence of this imbecile nephew, Ralph, a secret. No family cares to advertise its own misfortunes. But I have done wrong. Ralph was my elder brother's child ; he became my ward at sixteen months old ; the family land was his ; Hannah has always tended him. The infant was so dull, that, before

I moved down here, I had him examined by a doctor. Then I learnt that the child was an idiot. I said to Hannah, 'this is a family blot and reproach, and we must keep it quiet. There is ample room in Garwood vicarage, his existence need never be known.' I traded well with the child's property ; I have often been joked about the Raymond and Raymond on my door. The child's property helped the business, when the business was young ; therefore, his name had a right to figure on the plate beside my own. When Ralph grew up he shewed no signs of intelligence. Nosegays and new shillings were the only things in the whole visible creation for which he showed any strong predilection. To keep him quiet, Hannah supplied him with both regularly. The flowers of course required constant renewal, and so, strange to say, did the shillings ; for he dirtied and battered them about very soon, and when their freshness was gone, he required at once a new supply. Attention to this whim, brought Hannah, through Bradbeer's officiousness and stupidity, into a scrape as a supposed

utterer of false coin. Added to this, Ralph was a very chilly subject, and we had to keep up great fires in his rooms. I have little to add ; it seems, that Hannah fell ill the night I left ; the poor idiot found the door of his prison unsecured, and escaped in only his shoes and nightshirt ; three miles he wandered ; and at last fell weak and exhausted into the Kidston Upper Mill pool : was washed against the mill-wheel : and discovered battered and lifeless in the Lower stream. Philip, meanwhile, books himself at a small country station where he is not known, and departs on his share of our proposed enquiry. This Eyserbeck's catalogue of crimes is numerous, but of the heaviest, murder, I freely absolve him."

"Look out for yourselves," interposed the prisoner, having now fully regained his normal buoyant effrontery ; "look out for yourselves, squire, doctor, Julia, and constables ! There is redress in England, if not in Cropshire, for these wild accusations levied against me, for the conspiracies and blunders of incompetent magistrates. Strike

off these handcuffs at once, and let me depart. It will be worse for you all, and for Julia, my shrew of a wife, in particular, if I am not instantly obeyed. One word in your ear, Mrs. Bellamy, the blotting pad is dust and ashes. I reassume my legitimate rights."

"I am not *Mrs.* Bellamy," returned Julia firmly. "You were married already when you married me."

"Have you brought the certificate?" demanded Hannah from the bed. "He denies everything, master."

"This will convict him, then," pursued Lucas, producing an attested copy of the Penshingle register. "This shows Julius Bell intermarried with Hannah Armitage, two years before he married Julia Bellamy."

"I deny my identity with Julius Bell," spoke Christopher resolutely. "There is no evidence to prove it, but the word of this woman, half crazy, and wholly delirious. I dare say, the true Julius Bell was like me. I have been mistaken for scores of people in my time."

"Julius," said the sick woman with considerable dignity, "two things I require of you : first, that you own me as your legal wife ; second, that you tell me what you have done with my child. No one in this room believes in your denial. If you persist in it, I shall disclose a matter which took place in a tavern in Oxford Street, to which I followed you."

Christopher was past being astonished by this time, so he said brutally, with only a slight wince,

"You are no wife of mine, and I do not father your brat."

"Then," said Hannah, "I accuse this man of having consulted together with a companion, whom I did not know, how they should tamper with a cheque to save themselves from some money-lender."

"Who told you that?" blustered the prisoner livid with rage.

"My own ears," recounted Hannah, turning her eyes keenly on his face. "I ran against you in the street, traced you to this tavern, heard you retain a room for the evening. In a cupboard of that room

I persuaded the barmaid of the place to secrete me. I wished to learn your address, and force from you intelligence of my child. I heard then this plot about the cheque. You and the other man left the tavern together. Just as I was biding my chance to address you, both sprang into a hansom cab, and, before I could interpose, you drove off. I followed wildly on foot, but my strength soon failed. The cab was lost, and I never cast eyes on my husband from that day ; until when he called here, under the name of Eyserbeck, to consult master about that Samler boy."

"So," exclaimed Julia with flashing eyes, "you have destroyed the blotting pad in vain."

"I remember this fellow now," said Lucas. "I remember, how surprised Michaelson, the money-lender, my master was, when he and his accomplice paid up. I now first learn, how they got the necessary funds. Why the other name in this business was——"

"Hush," said Esdaile gravely, "read this telegram."

Lucas took it and read to himself,

"Mr. Rutherford died at four this afternoon, having never regained consciousness after his first seizure."

Lucas shook his head, and handed back the message.

"Poor Harriet," he murmured to himself. "Well, he is best gone. Little thinks his wife, that she secreted Hannah to prove her future husband an accomplice in a forgery. I am thankful he is taken."

"Come," said Esdaile to the prisoner, "what do you say to all this?"

"Lies, lies, lies," responded Christopher resolutely, marking time with his heel on the floor.

"Then we must play our last card," said Philip Raymond, and, going to the door, called down the stairs,

"Mr. Gerrard Rutherford."

Christopher's lip fell as the clergyman entered, and an expression of despair seemed to efface the buoyancy of the adventurer.

"You remember marrying Julius Bell to Hannah Armitage?" said Philip to the minister, in a matter-of-fact voice.

"Twenty-two years since," added Gerrard stepping forward, "I remember the fact well."

"Did anything impress this marriage specially upon you?" pursued Philip, narrowly watching Bellamy.

"They were the only couple, over whom I ever read the marriage service," returned the clergyman with a nod.

"Look round," suggested Philip, "and, allowing for lapse of time as altering features, can you recognize here either of that bridal couple?"

"Yes," said Gerrard firmly; "the person in bed is the wife, the man in handcuffs is the husband."

"And that," exclaimed the squire triumphantly, "is checkmate to Christopher Bellamy."

"The game is up," snarled Christopher, glancing downwards with an impatient oath. "I will tell you about your child, Hannah."

The sick woman's eyes glistened, and she held out both her hands.

"I put it out to nurse at Chelsea," he



pursued in a grating voice ; "but I soon got tired of paying the bill. Besides, when I meant to marry Miss Bellamy and reform, I did not want the child to turn up against me. So, the night before our nuptials, Julia, I went to the house, where it was out at nurse : took it away, and deposited it on the flags : close outside Sir Hans Sloane's monument near the old church, Chelsea ; just before I heard the policeman coming on his rounds. I learnt casually afterwards in Italy, that some one had adopted it, and saved it from the work-house. But, beyond this, I know no further, whether the brat be dead or living."

Here the doctor came forward hurriedly with a very pale face.

"Please all go away now," he faltered, "there is nothing more to be said. The invalid requires rest. I will remain with her alone for the present."

They all filed out one by one. Their steps gradually died away on the wooden staircase.

The doctor approached the bed-side and knelt down, he raised one of the invalid's

wasted hands and kissed it. Hannah felt that he was weeping.

“Mother,” he suddenly cried, “I am the child, who was lost on Cheyne Walk.”





## CHAPTER XVIII.

### SUN ON THE DIAL.

**P**HILIP and the squire passed down the stairs, last of those who left Hannah's room. Esdaile had thrown his arm affectionately across Philip's shoulder. The squire felt as if a son had been restored to him. At the vicarage door a crowd had gathered, for the news had spread like wild-fire, and people were anxious to judge with their own eyes of Philip's safety. The Priory carriage was waiting, and Julia Bellamy was already seated in it; but, when the squire appeared leaning on Philip, a great cheer was raised, which startled the horses. Many folks pressed forward tumultuously

to shake hands with the young lawyer. After some difficulty, the squire pushed Philip through the seething mass up into the vehicle before them.

"Am I to come to the Priory, then?" Philip had asked in the tumult.

"I must bring you to Violet, poor girl. She has been rather ailing lately," said the squire, tremulously.

Philip's heart gave a great bound. He had longed, yet feared to ask, how the rumour of his death had affected Violet. She had cared, then, and, as it seemed, very much.

Little was said during the drive. The events of the last few hours had been so tumultuous and overwhelming, that both the squire and Julia were fully occupied with their own thoughts.

As they neared the house Esdaile arranged a little plan.

"I don't like," said the squire, "for Violet to see you, Philip, until I have prepared her. So will you please get out here, and wait in the shrubberies?"

Philip, therefore, alighted, while the

squire and Miss Bellamy drove on. Then Esdaile said to Julia,—

“You must do me a good turn; my sister-in-law wants tact, and I don’t wish to tell these joyful tidings to Violet in her presence. So I will also leave the carriage a little further on. You drive up to the door alone, and tell Violet, that I wish to speak to her near the sun-dial.”

So the squire got out also, and leant against the dial’s pedestal, while Julia in solitary state approached the Priory door.

“It was on this spot,” mused the squire, with glazed eyes, “that my niece heard the bad news, and in this place she shall hear the good.”

Presently, Violet was seen approaching, with slow and languid steps, from the house. She seemed to have lost all the elasticity of youth, and dull blue rims of sorrow surrounded her pretty eyes.

“Uncle,” she began, glancing at him with surprise, “how radiant you look.”

“Violet,” he rejoined, drawing her tenderly towards him, “poor Philip, you know——”

Here he broke down, and began to lose his self-possession. The task he had undertaken was pleasant, but not a little difficult.

"I can't bear to talk about that yet, dear uncle," replied Violet, covering her eyes with her hands. "Let us leave this sundial. I have taken a horror to it."

"I have purposely brought you here, darling, because—I have good news——"

"I don't enjoy good news now," said Violet, with a quiet sigh.

"Suppose," stammered the squire, growing desperate, "that poor Philip, who was murdered, you know, had not been murdered quite so—hem—hard as we expected, Violet. I really do not know, what I am saying."

"Indeed, uncle," she agreed, with a low moan, "either I am gone silly, or you are talking sad foolish nonsense."

"I mean," floundered the squire, "if now Philip were to find himself only rather murdered, and just a little better."

The squire's incoherent words conveyed no impression to her brain; and, at first,

she stood before him a living picture of distress and perplexity. Suddenly, a great gleam overspread her face, for she read in her uncle's eyes without any spoken word, as she stood with a hand on each of his shoulders, that her lover was somehow safe.

"Philip is alive," she gasped ; "where is he, my uncle, where is he?"

"In fact," acknowledged the squire, overpowered by her vehemence, "he is all the better for this murder, and—you will find him waiting for you behind those laurel bushes."

She was gone like an arrow from a bow, on the impulse of her frank young heart, in the direction which the squire had indicated, with all her soul glowing in her eyes, to meet Philip.

The squire patiently leant on the sun-dial. No Violet yet. Harvey was patient and in a meditative mood. He heard the evening winds ripple his Priory elms, and pass sighing away over the rich meadow-lands beyond. He needed calm after the tumult of the day's events. He

pored upon the horizontal cloud-lines, where the fallen sun died every moment into a richer death. He remembered his own young romance, and how that man had shattered it; a spurious fellow, whom it was hardly worth despising. He thought of his niece among the laurel bushes, greeting her lover restored to life; and, middle-aged as he was, the squire became sentimental. Two thoughts were very sweet to his soul,—Julia Bellamy was free from that unholy wedlock, and Julia Bellamy was now, for the first time, beneath the roof of his fathers.

Mrs. Wilfred tripping, somewhat flurried, across the lawn in full evening dress, ended his meditations.

“A nice time, Harvey,” she hurried out, with some asperity, “for the master of the house to be leaning about against sundials; dinner has been twice put back, and poor Mr. Stimpson is literally blue from want of food.”

“One moment, Clementina, I must wait,” said the squire, with a meaning smile.



"I never," remonstrated the widow, "had such a house full of guests to handle. Miss Bellamy in a recess, full of tears, and hardly originating a remark. Mr. Padfield asleep upon two blue books, thoroughly worn out, with his shoes off. Mr. Stimpson moaning feebly opposite the clock, and telling me, that for thirteen years his club cook has never kept him four minutes waiting ; you, mossaing your coat-elbows upon sun-dials. And, where upon earth has that tiresome girl of mine got to ?"

"I cannot say—exactly," replied the squire, pardonably mendacious.

"If," pursued the widow, with a tight shake of her head, "that silly girl has ventured, as I will be bound she has, across this damp grass in her evening shoes, I give her up ; she will be dead before she is married !"

"I think not, my dear," said the squire, smiling again quietly ; "indeed, I venture to predict the exact contrary."

"And much you know about girls," murmured his sister-in-law ; adding more

distractedly, "as if I was not flurried, and driven enough already; with every kind of contradictory report reaching me during the last few hours from the village; one person running in with one story, another person with an opposite account; indeed, I wish to understand distinctly, and once for all; whether I am to consider this young lawyer as murdered or unmurdered."

"You shall judge for yourself, Clementina,—presently."

"Not," continued Mrs. Wilfred, with a disdainful cough, "that I consider young Raymond any great acquisition in either capacity."

The squire began to titter.

"My dear, you have landed yourself in a no-thoroughfare of nonsense."

"Is the mutton to be burnt to a cinder, Mr. Esdaile?" exclaimed the widow, severely ignoring the last remark.

"Two guests are not yet arrived," said the squire, slyly; "and I do not intend to begin without them. Here they are!"

At this juncture Violet and Philip emerged from the laurel-bushes; she was

leaning on his arm, in that pretty confiding way, in which an engaged girl clings to her lover.

Mrs. Wilfred started, and reddened with extreme vexation.

"This is your doing, squire," she flashed out, angrily, "you have stolen a march upon me, while I was entertaining your famished guests."

"I only, as the doctors say, assisted nature," expostulated the squire.

"Pray, Mr. Esdaile," she rejoined, icily, "are you aware, that this young man has not got a penny?"

"I know, Clementina, that the girl is no better off; so let us give them our blessing with a good grace—and then order dinner."



## CHAPTER XIX.

### PAIRING OFF.

**H**ERE remains little to be told. That day three months, the marriage bells of Violet Esdaile and Philip Raymond rang out merrily from the steeple of Garwood Parish Church. The squire settled five hundred a year on his niece, and Lucas Raymond took his nephew into partnership. Mrs. Matthew Raymond was great at the wedding-breakfast in a brocade silk gown. She sat next to Emma Klein, and informed her neighbour, that she had long predicted both the partnership and these nuptials. The happy pair went for a tour in Devonshire; and, on their return, entered into possession of

the upper rooms at the vicarage, from which the ghost was finally extruded. Poor imbecile Ralph was buried in Garwood churchyard ; and Violet, on the morning of her marriage, laid a camellia garland on his grave.

Mrs. Wilfred Esdaile never liked the match, and this, joined to other circumstances shortly to be mentioned, made her retire from the Priory in high dudgeon to Cheltenham. Here she long remained one of the brightest ornaments and the greatest terrors of that much frequented watering-place.

The Reverend Paul Wing left Garwood during the ceremony, and was heard repeating some poetry on the subject of bells, in a lonely spot on a neighbouring heath, by Tommy Samler ; who, as the school got a whole holiday in honour of the event, had roamed out bird-stoning in that direction.

The ceremony was performed by Gerrard Rutherford in Wing's absence ; but, when the curate crept back to his lodgings after dusk, much exercised in mind and body,

he found, to his horror, a visitor awaiting him ; who announced himself, in due time, as a sheriff's officer, and arrested the unhappy Wing at the suit of Mr. Westcott, the Oxford tailor ; after this event, it became necessary for the absentee vicar to replace Wing ; and Gerrard Rutherford succeeded him as the Garwood curate. In due time, the absentee vicar absented himself from this earth, and Esdaile presented Gerrard Rutherford to the living.

Christopher Bellamy was tried at the Blackwater Assizes for bigamy and his other various misdeeds, and sentenced to fourteen years penal servitude.

In due time, Harvey Esdaile persuaded Julia Bellamy to come to the Priory as its mistress. Mrs. Wilfred's denunciations, when the fact was announced to her, were pathetic, sublime, and sulphurous. But these have no place in our narrative. Julia found in Harvey Esdaile all those qualities, the absence of which in Christopher had brought ruin on her early days. They were a most attached couple, and her kindness to the poor of the district became proverbial.

Hannah Armitage survived the recovery of her son about six weeks ; during her last days she was tenderly nursed by Edgar Lapworth. She remained at the vicarage till her death. She died much shattered in mind and body, but peacefully and without physical suffering.

After Basset Rutherford's death, the Blackwater Bank became involved in difficulties and ultimately stopped payment. His vast schemes and ventures were wholly out of proportion to Basset's actual capital. While he lived and was strong, and while his credit was undoubted, all this went on well enough. His wakeful energy and indomitable activity made one pound do the work of three, and bills and paper helped besides. After his sudden demise, the truth leaked out, the depositors in the bank became nervous, the shares in his pet schemes fell, and the collapse came. His liabilities proved to be enormous ; but it was hoped, that the family settlement would save Kidston Manor and Estate, to which Caroline was now entitled. It was discovered by the lawyer of the creditors, that

the doubtful entail, as it stood in the will of old Rutherford, the uncle, was, after all, void and illegal. So Kidston went to the hammer, and only six shillings in the pound were paid by the executors, even with the help of that estate.

When Gilbert Bramley found how things were going, his letters to Caroline became both cold and unfrequent. Caroline could not explain this, until her aunt, with whom she remained while the Manor was sold, confessed ; that Gilbert had been informed of the supposed fact of Caroline's inheritance of the estate, subject only to her Uncle Basset's life-interest in the land. As Caroline never knew of this until the entail proved void, its loss affected her very little. But on learning, that Bramley had courted her as an heiress, she now thoroughly understood his altered tone ; and the high-spirited and indignant girl at once wrote, offering to release him from his engagement. Bramley took her at her word in a remarkably cool reply, in which he regretted, that his own estates were



already too heavily mortgaged to admit of his marrying, where the charms of the young lady, however great in themselves, were unsupported by more solid advantages. And, having got Caroline off his mind, Bramley broke up his establishment, sold his house, and departed on a tour in the east.

Emma Klein could not recover her disillusion and despair at Bramley's perfidy. In spite of Julia Bellamy's attempts at consolation, accompanied by the offer of a permanent home in Arabian Crescent, Emma refused to be comforted. Soon after Violet's marriage, she entered a sisterhood, and began a career of self-denying usefulness in one of our large seaport towns.

Gerrard Rutherford remained, as we have said, at Garwood, to replace Wing. He took a small private house in the town. Caroline naturally lived with him, and Gerrard returned good for evil, in sheltering his brother's wife, who was left nearly destitute. In course of time, Lapworth

and Caroline adjusted their differences and got married. He forgave her for having deserted him in favour of Bramley, and she had learned to appreciate the sterling qualities, that lay beneath the not wholly prepossessing exterior of the doctor. As they drove away for their honeymoon, Harriet Rutherford looked dolefully out of the window to see them depart. She had sent away her child Jessie to a boarding-school. The house was deserted, and the widow's loneliness came upon her in its full force. Lucas Raymond passed at this juncture. He knew instinctively that she felt solitary and desolate. He had seen Caroline and Edgar drive away; and Gerrard Rutherford had started out, after they were gone, to a distant part of the parish. Lucas came up and sat with Harriet; and they talked of old days, and she told him, how lonely she felt before he came. It was growing dusk, and she asked him as a favour, not to leave her till Gerrard came back; then, when the shades deepened, the widow began to cry; and there and then, between the lights, Lucas asked again—as he had done once

before between the lights twenty-two years ago,—if he need go away at all, and this time she answered “No.”

In the old days, Harriet had dismissed Lucas, because she viewed marriage then, only as a royal road to ease and independence. Her estimate of the life-contract was the prosaic, mercenary, practical one of the ordinary woman. Julia, on the other hand, had erred from ideas too high-flown and aspirations too fantastical. She had rejected Harvey because he was faultless; she had refused his alliance, because it was on all points so unexceptionable. The romantic girl preferred Christopher, full of failings, and universally spoken against. It seemed to her a nobler thing, to reform a rake by the devotion of her loving influence; some self-sacrifice, at least, was needed for this chimerical project; to espouse a person of property no immolation of self was required. Was it not rather tame work, after all, making bright the days of a man, whose very virtues promised him a happiness wholly independent of the accident of any woman's love? Thus had Julia

analyzed her motives too finely for actual life. Thus had she fallen into the toils and calamities of a generous error. This quixotic union of hers has borne its appropriate fruit in the pages of our story. Hence arose to Julia these long years of desolation, and *Hence these Tears!*

THE END.





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